

“FIGURING IT OUT”:
A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY EXPLORING THE
DEVELOPMENT OF NOVICE, ALTERNATIVELY
CERTIFIED SPECIAL EDUCATORS IN OKLAHOMA

By
JOSHUA LOWELL HAWKINS
Bachelor of Science in Education: Special Education
Southwestern Oklahoma State University
Weatherford, Oklahoma
2001

Master of Science in Education: Educational Leadership
Southwestern Oklahoma State University
Weatherford, Oklahoma
2012

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
December, 2017

“FIGURING IT OUT”:
A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY EXPLORING THE
DEVELOPMENT OF NOVICE, ALTERNATIVELY
CERTIFIED SPECIAL EDUCATORS IN OKLAHOMA

Dissertation Approved:

Jane S. Vogler, Ph.D.

Dissertation Adviser

Julie Koch, Ph.D.

Mike Yough Ph.D.

Lucy Bailey, Ph.D.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost, I would like to thank my wife, Heather, and children, Elyse, Aidan, Aislinn, Elias, and Evangeline, for their love and support. This work is dedicated to them for they, of all, have sacrificed most to see it come to fruition. I would also like to thank my parents, Toby and Jackie, who instilled in me a love for learning and for teaching. To them I credit the habits that have sustained me as a man and as a scholar. My siblings, Rachel, Mary Ruth, and Timothy, “who understand me better than I understand myself,” have been with me continuously as spiritual companions. I am grateful for their friendship and love.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my participants. As much as the work is mine, it is theirs’. They, in the midst of “figuring it out,” allowed me access to their experiences as novice special educators through offering their recollections, their reflections, and their most valuable and limited resource—time. I hope that in sharing their stories, I have in some way imbued their struggles and successes with value beyond their individual experiences.

Additionally, I would like to thank my colleagues—particularly Dr. Martie Young, Dr. Christee Jenlink, Dr. Steven Mackie, and Ms. Patty Sanders. The constancy of their support evinced a belief in my ultimate success that I rarely realized. Their company has raised my own stature. Other friends to whom I am ever indebted are Mr. Lance Barrick, Mr. Nathan Hawkins, Dr. David Davis, and Dr. Caleb Lack.

Finally, I would like to thank my committee members. Though expressions fail, I must articulate my gratitude specifically and especially to Dr. Lucy Bailey and Dr. Jane Vogler. Their guidance and patience throughout was remarkable and is greatly appreciated. I hope to carry on the excellent scholarly practices that they regularly modeled for me. Dr. Bailey’s depth, prescience, and genuineness allowed me to “sound the depths” and to rigorously explore the visible and invisible. Dr. Vogler’s constant refrain, “Keep going!” kept me going. For these and the many and various ways they assisted me as an instructors, advisors, and friends, I am grateful.

Name: JOSHUA LOWELL HAWKINS

Date of Degree: DECEMBER, 2017

Title of Study: “FIGURING IT OUT”: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY EXPLORING
THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVE CERTIFIED SPECIAL
EDUCATORS IN OKLAHOMA

Major Field: EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Abstract:

Scope and Method of Study: The shortage of special educators in Oklahoma and similar markets is profound (Aragon, 2016). The number of teachers prepared through traditional programs are insufficient for public needs. Therefore, alternative routes to certification for special educators are proliferating (Feistritzer, 2011; Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005). Minimal research is available on the quality and effectiveness of these programs partly because programs vary considerably in terms of infrastructure, length and intensity, characteristics, and participant demographics (Rosenberg et al., 2007). The majority of extant research is limited to program evaluation; negligible research examines the dispositions or developmental perceptions of program participants (Sindelar et al., 2010; Wasburn-Moses & Rosenberg, 2008). Furthermore, the prevalence and recurrence of shortages in special education warrants the consideration of recruitment and retention of special educators (Billingsley, 2005; Ingersoll, 2007). The associative benefits of developing teachers’ capacity and commitment was suggested by Brunsting et al. (2014) and Sindelar et al. (2010). Thus, this qualitative case study (Stake, 2006) inductively explored nine novice special educators’ perceptions of their development while participating in alternative routes to certification in Oklahoma.

Findings and Conclusions: Emergent themes included: intentionality—wherein the locus of intention for development was found to rest primarily with the participants; experience—wherein key formative experiences occurring before or during development were found to be influential in shaping participants’ perspectives and practice; “overwhelmed” to overcoming—wherein relatedness, competence development, developmental awareness, professional identity formation, and growth orientation were recognized as integral emergent features; and finally, an underlying sense of “care” emerged and appeared fundamental to participants’ motivation and perceptions’ of their experiences as novice teachers, the nature of their roles, and, ultimately, their commitment. The organic quality of development and the need for individualization of support are discussed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Problem	2
Purpose	6
Methodology	7
Research Questions	8
Theoretical Framework	8
Operational Definitions	9
Summary	10
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	12
Theoretical Framework	13
Ecological Model	14
Self-Determination Theory	15
An Integrated Approach	16
The Market	19
Demand	19
Supply	20
Traditional Certification	21
Alternative Certification	22
General Information	23
Characteristics	24
Special Education	30
Teacher Retention and Attrition	33
Personal Factors	34
Work Related Factors	34
Affective Response Factors	38
Recommendations for Retention	40
Teacher Development	44
Summary	46
III. METHODOLOGY	48
Theoretical Perspective	48

Research Questions	49
Research Design.....	49
Participants and Setting.....	50
Procedure	54
Data Collection	54
Data Analysis	56
Transcription	58
Coding.....	59
Trustworthiness.....	60
Positionality	60
Summary	62
 IV. INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDIES	 63
Olivia.....	65
Nancy	70
Claire.....	74
Caroline.....	78
Marie	83
Tera	88
Stanley.....	92
Diane	98
Vivian.....	102
Summary	107
 V. CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS.....	 108
Theme 1: Intentionality: Individual or Systemic	108
Theme 2: Experience: Formative and Consequential	114
Theme 3: “Overwhelmed” to Overcoming	118
Sub-Theme: Community.....	122
Sub-Theme: Competence.....	125
Sub-Theme: Conscious of Development	128
Sub-Theme: Professional Identity Formation.....	129
Sub-Theme: Growth.....	131
Theme 4: Motivation: <i>I Care</i>	133
Summary	137
 CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS.....	 139
Discussion	140
Limitations	152
Implications.....	153

Practice.....	153
Research.....	157
Conclusion	159
REFERENCES	160
APPENDICES	172
Appendix A.....	172
Appendix B.....	173
Appendix C	174

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1.1 Newly Certified Special Education Teachers in Oklahoma by Route	5
3.1 Program and Formal Training.....	53
3.2 Data Collection Table	56
3.3 Example of Case-Record	57
4.1 Certification Status.....	64
4.2 Comparison of Teaching Experience, Work Experience with Individuals with Disabilities, and Educational Attainments	64

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
5.1 Plan of Study provided by participant	113

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Alternative routes to teacher certification are increasing as traditional preparation programs fail to produce enough teachers to satisfy public need. Notably, math, science, bi-lingual, and special education are frequently identified as critical areas of need (Aragon, 2016). In particular, the proliferation of alternative routes to certification in special education is a relatively new phenomenon in need of research (Rosenberg, Boyer, Sindelar, & Mirsa, 2007; Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2001, 2005). Wasburn-Moses and Rosenberg (2008) reflect, “Professional literature on [alternative route] programs in special education is still in its infancy” (p. 257). Furthermore, extant research is limited primarily to program evaluation and not special education teachers’ characteristic dispositions or developmental perceptions while participating in alternative routes to certification (Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005). Particular attention to these concerns is warranted due to the persistence of teacher shortages and high level of attrition from the field (Brownell, Sindelar, Bishop, Langley, & Seo, 2002). Ingersoll (2007) aptly notes that merely continuing to yield adequate numbers of teachers to meet demands, either through traditional or alternative routes, is insufficient; rather, the public education system requires recruitment, preparation, and retention of high quality, well-equipped teachers who are willing to meet the intensive demands of the profession (Billingsley,

2005). Towards effective development, which enhances retention, Sindelar, Brownell, and Billingsley (2010) assert that the cultivation of professional “knowledge, competence, and commitment” (p. 12), or what Brunstin, Sreckovic, and Lane (2014) term “capacity and commitment” (p. 682), should be the foremost focus and ultimate goal of preparation programs. Thus, this study explores, through qualitative case study inquiry, the development of professional capacity and commitment of nine special education teachers participating in an alternative route to certification in Oklahoma.

Problem

Teacher shortage remains a political and scholarly concern because of its practical implications. As is noted in Guarino, Santibanez, and Daley’s (2006) review of teacher recruitment and retention, the issue simplifies to one of supply and demand: if there are not enough teachers in supply to satisfy the demand, then system capacity and efficiency lowers. It is not simply a matter of filling positions cursorily but hiring and keeping high quality teachers who are committed and capable (Sindelar, Brownell, & Billingsley, 2010). Thus, the problem of mobilizing enough teachers to support needs of a given community is both a problem of recruitment and retention (Ingersoll, 2001). Ingersoll (2007) analogizes, “The image that comes to mind is of a bucket rapidly losing water because of holes in the bottom. Pouring more water into the bucket will not be the answer if the holes are not first patched” (p. 6).

A variety of alternative routes to certification (ARC) have been developed nationally to address teacher shortages. Generally, ARC programs are “differentiated from traditional teacher education programs in that they are generally shorter, involve candidates in teaching immediately or shortly after they start their programs, have a

greater field component, and cater to a more diverse population” (Wasburn-Moses & Rosenberg, 2008, p. 257). However, individuals who opt to pursue alternative certification often enter the classroom without the benefit of pre-service professional training, frequently enter difficult environments with minimal or inappropriate support, and must attend to intensive professional duties and obligations irrespective of their level of experience while also continuing their education (Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2001, 2005; Unruh & Holt, 2010). Alternatively, certified teachers are more prone to attrition than their traditionally certified counterparts (Redding & Smith, 2016). This pattern may be due, in part, to the design of alternative certification programs which vary significantly in regard to program infrastructure, program length and intensity, program characteristics, and participant demographics (Feistritzer, 2008; Rosenberg et al., 2007). Redding and Smith (2016) speculate, “...various organizational supports for new teachers may deter turnover, [therefore] future research...could explore the ways in which AC teachers benefit from various organizational supports” (p. 1116). The proliferation of ARC in special education is a relatively new phenomenon (Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005; Wasburn-Moses & Rosenberg, 2008).

The field of special education is nested within the larger composite of public education. As such, special education teachers (SET) are required to maintain professional duties similar to those of all educators; additionally, special educators manage a host of other concerns related specifically to special education (Council for Exceptional Children, 2012). Special education teachers often cite the volume and variety of these professional obligations as one reason why they leave the profession (due to burnout) or transfer to general education (Billingsley, 2005; Brunsting, Sreckovic, &

Lane, 2014). In addition to their formal professional duties, SETs work with special education students who, as a population, are more likely to participate in deviant behavior, are twice as likely to be suspended as their nondisabled peers, and are more likely to fail or drop-out (63.1% graduation rate compared to 82.3% of students without a disability) (USDE, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2016; USDE.IES, National Center for Education Statistics, 2013-14). Special education students often require substantial direct and indirect educational support in order to sustain academic progress—particularly with increasing standardization and utilization of performance testing (Zane, 2012). Furthermore, providing high-quality, comprehensive educational programs to students with special needs requires competency in a range of knowledge domains and instructional areas (Billingsley, Brownell, & Kamman, 2013; Rosenberg et al., 2007). A variety of environmental and work-related factors contribute to the comparatively higher attrition rates of special education teachers to general education teachers (Boe & Cook, 2006; Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008; McLeskey, et al, 2004). Boe, Bobbit, Cook, Whitener, & Weber (1997) stated, “Teacher turnover has long been a concern in both special education and general education because it represents instability in the teaching force and raises the prospect of shortages of qualified replacement teachers” (p. 390).

In a recent survey conducted by the Oklahoma State School Board Association (OSSBA), administrators from across the state reported a high number of instructor vacancies. Due to this shortage, 60% of school leaders anticipated seeking employees with emergency teaching certifications, 50% expected to increase class sizes, and 33% projected offering fewer courses. OSSBA also reported an excess of 1000 teaching vacancies in the state of Oklahoma despite the elimination of 600 teaching positions and

the issuance of 685 emergency certificates (Watson, 2015). From July to September 2015, the Oklahoma State Board of Education approved 842 emergency certificates whereas only 825 total were issued in the four preceding years combined (Eger, 2015). Oklahoma State Superintendent of Education Joy Hofmeister stated: “We still have more students to serve, and with a growing teacher shortage, it only compounds the problem. We also know our schools of education, collectively, are noticing a drop in enrollment” (“Oklahoma leads nation in cuts,” 2016). In Oklahoma, the profound shortage of special education teachers has resulted in instituting a variety of political and practical measures to be instituted (Palmer, 2017). The diversification of routes to certification was one such measure.

The prevalence of and reliance on alternative routes to certification is a relatively recent trend in Oklahoma. Table 1.1 compares the number of newly certified special education teachers who participated in either an alternative certification program or a traditional program from 2010 to 2016.

Table 1.1

Newly Certified Special Education Teachers in Oklahoma by Route

SCHOOL YEAR	ALTERNATIVELY CERTIFIED	TRADITIONALLY CERTIFIED
2010/11	1	**
2011/12	47	85
2012/13	72	75
2013/14	188	70
2014/15	184	107
2015/16	144	62
TOTAL (2011/12-2015/16)	635	399

Note. Data acquired from the Oklahoma State Department of Education

**Number of traditionally certified teachers is unknown for the 2010/11 academic year.

Proportionally, over the five-year period from 2011/12 to 2015/16, 635 (61.4%) newly certified SETs in Oklahoma participated in an alternative preparation program compared

to 399 (38.6%) who participated in a traditional preparation program. Notably, only one newly certified SET participated in an alternative preparation program in 2010/11.

Rosenberg and Sindelar (2005) conclude after reviewing the available literature on ARC for special education that “unbridled program development and scarcity of existing literature to guide it have created a situation that cries out for additional research” (p. 124). The scarcity continues. Further, though literature related to program effectiveness exists (Feistritz, 2008, 2011), application to the preparation and development of special educators may be limited because of the specificity of their professional responsibilities (Rosenberg et al., 2007). To summarize: limited research is available examining ARC in special education (Wasburn-Moses & Rosenberg, 2008); what does exist is problematic because considerable variation exists in the design and effectiveness of ARC (Quigley, 2010; Rosenberg et al., 2007); minimal research has examined specific characteristics of special educators participating in ARC (Mccray, 2012; Rosenberg et al., p. 2007) or special educators generally (Billingsley, 2004b). Sindelar and his colleagues (2010) assert “Learning more about the knowledge, beliefs, practices, and induction of minimally prepared teachers and models to support them should be a priority” (p. 16).

Purpose

Novice, alternatively certified special education teachers (NACSETs) are at high risk for attrition (Brunsting et al., 2014; Ingersoll, 2001; Redding & Smith, 2016). This risk is relevant in Oklahoma where the majority of newly certified special education teachers are pursuing certification by alternative routes. Teacher development of expertise is a process that is influenced by multiple factors (Bereiter & Scardamalia,

1993; Hattie & Yates, 2014) and in turn serves as a factor of influence on teachers' career choices (Brownell & Smith, 1993; Hong, 2010). Therefore, using qualitative case study methodology (Stake, 2006), this study explores novice, alternatively certified special education teachers' (NACSET) perceptions of their preparation and development as special educators.

Methodology

Nine novice special education teachers who had participated or were participating in either the *Career Development Program for Paraprofessionals (para-to-teacher)* route or the *Non-Traditional Special Education Certification (boot camp)* route were purposively solicited to participate in this qualitative case study (Stake, 2006). Each participant constituted a case. I collected data over a six-month period in the form of in-depth interviews, artifacts, and observations. These data sources were organized into case-records of each teacher-participant and analyzed inductively and holistically. I developed individual case narratives in depth and detail to gain insight into how participants perceived and experienced the phenomenon of interest (Stake, 1998). These narratives, in conjunction to the case-records, were used to develop individual case study reports. Subsequently, I reconstituted the individual cases into a singular unit, that is, a composite of the nine cases together, and conducted a cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006). Themes were identified through a rigorous process of intensive inductive analysis. Trustworthiness and authenticity were maintained through accepted practices (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Stake, 1998, 2006).

Research Questions

As a qualitative case study (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1998), research questions served as guides for directing the various levels of inquiry. The overarching research questions that guided this study are:

1. How do novice, alternatively certified special education teachers perceive their development as professionals in Oklahoma?
2. What factors contribute to or detract from novice, alternatively certified special education teachers' development of *capacity* and *commitment* in Oklahoma?

Theoretical Framework

Theory guides the investigation process, providing parameters by which a problem may be investigated. I utilized two different theoretical frameworks for the current project. The intention was that together, these models would account for the scope of different elements included in this study. Brownell and Smith's (1993) adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's (1976) ecological model of education provided the general framework for the design of the project. Understanding the different and interrelated levels of experience was important in allowing for multi-dimensional consideration of the broad array of factors "...that lead to a teacher's decision to stay or leave the classroom" (Brownell & Smith, 1993, p. 271). The cases were conceptualized as units nested within a multi-leveled, interactional system consistent with this model. Findings are limited to the bounded case and presentation limited to what emerged.

Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (1985) posits that individuals have innate psychological needs basic to their constitution: the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. "These needs...provide the basis for categorizing aspects

of the environment as supportive versus antagonistic to integrated and vital human functioning” (Ryan & Deci, 2002, p. 6). Satisfaction of these basic needs is associated with the facilitation of growth processes that promote intrinsic motivation, personal integration, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Self-determination theory (SDT) assisted in categorizing environmental and personal factors that contribute to teachers’ development. The needs dimensions defined by SDT emerged and were related to participants’ perception of the phenomenon of interest.

Operational Definitions

- **Special Education Teachers (SETs):** Teachers certified (provisionally or standard) in accordance with state and federal requirements whose teaching assignments primarily involve teaching students who qualify for special education services.
- **Alternatively Certified Teachers (AC):** Individuals who are not traditionally trained and certified (TC) (i.e. did not complete a degree in education through an accredited institution which resulted in certification) who are currently serving in the professional capacity as teacher. Though there is some variance in the requirements from state to state, at minimum, AC teachers have a baccalaureate degree and are required to complete additional professional development (e.g. take education related courses from a higher education institution) in a prescribed time in order to become fully certified (standard certification).
- **Novice, alternatively certified special education teachers (NACSET):** For the purpose of this study, *novice* teachers are considered those who have taught for 3 or fewer years. This definition is consistent with the time constraint set forth by the Oklahoma State Department of Education before which all requirements for standard

certification (i.e. 12-18 hours coursework at an institution of higher education and passing the requisite competency exams) must be fulfilled. It is also consistent with Berliner's (1988, 1994, 2000) work examining qualitative and quantitative differences between novice and expert teachers wherein he proposes that it takes three to five years to proceed from a novice to a competent teacher.

- **Capacity:** For the purposes of this study, capacity is operationalized as knowledge about and competent use of professional practices (Elliot, McGregor, & Thrash, 2002; Shulman, 1987; Sindelar et al., 2007). This entails: knowledge of special education practices and procedures (CEC, 2012); pedagogical knowledge including instructional methods and strategies as well as basic classroom management techniques (Billingsley, Brownell, Israel, & Kamman, 2013); knowledge of professional practices which enhance collegiality and collaboration (Friend & Cook, 2013); and competence in the application of their knowledge through deliberative practices (Hattie & Yates, 2014).
- **Commitment:** For the purposes of this study, commitment is operationalized as teachers' devotion to the profession (i.e. work, students, and purposes) such that personal costs and professional difficulties are equalized by perceived intrinsic and extrinsic benefits (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006). Commitment is related to job-satisfaction and effective management of stress (Brownell et al., 2002; Billingsley, 2004b).

Summary

The need for competent and committed special education teachers in Oklahoma, and elsewhere, is acute. Understanding that effective retention is as important as

effective recruitment towards maintaining the teacher workforce (Ingersoll, 2007) and that development is correlated to retention (Billingsley, 2005; Hong, 2010) provided the initial impetus and rationale for this study. When states and schools struggle to sufficiently supply high-quality teachers through traditional preparation routes, alternative routes may be a viable alternative. Understanding characteristics of both is important. Thus, this study informs stakeholders, in a limited and contextually dependent fashion, about how this specific group of teachers perceived their preparation and development as NACSETs. These insights may inform programmatic decisions and practices in the future.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore novice, alternatively certified special education teachers' perceptions of their preparation and development as professionals. System-level characteristics shape an individual's experiences and thereby his or her development (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). As such, I present literature discussing the influence of micro-system, meso-system, exo-system, and macro-system factors. At the macro-system level, it was important to review current research related to supply and demand of special education teachers and current market conditions in order to characterize the uncertainty surrounding and instability within the field. These conditions have prompted, in part, the influx of alternatively certified teachers into the workforce. Alternatively certified teachers and special education teachers, as sub-groups of the teacher population, encounter system-level conditions which make them more susceptible to attrition than traditionally certified teachers; thus, research concerning alternatively certified teacher and special education teacher characteristics was relevant to the current study. Furthermore, an examination of system-level factors that affect teacher retention and attrition assisted in identifying those specifically impacting the participants of this study and their development.

Implementation and fostering of retention-enhancing factors (Billingsley, 2004a) with ongoing professional development was anticipated to mitigate the likelihood of system-level impact (i.e. attrition); thus, these factors were briefly examined in anticipation of their manifestation (or lack of) in the current study. What was known about effective teacher development was presented in conjunction with the presentation of retention-enhancing factors. Finally, basic psychological needs fulfillment was regarded as a central formative feature of a productive work environment and reflective of systemic impact at the individual level (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Therefore, self-determination theory was introduced more fully and situated in coordination with Brownell and Smith's (1993) model. When possible, I have included relevant information specific to the context in which this study was conducted (i.e. Oklahoma).

Theoretical Framework

Some scholars argue that *a priori* theoretical selection is contradictory to assumptions implicit in naturalistic inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, the theories selected and subsequently described were informative and served to guide the process of inquiry for this study. This approach was consistent with Mertz and Anfara's (2015) assertion that, "...the role of theory in qualitative research [is] basic, central, and foundational...Theory influences the way the researcher approaches the study and pervades almost all aspects of the study" (p. 227). Brownell and Smith's (1993) adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's (1976) ecological model of education and Deci and Ryan's (1985, 2000) self-determination theory provided a theoretical basis for investigation and analysis.

Ecological Model

Brownell and Smith's (1993) conceptual model is "sufficiently complex and capable of integrating attrition variables and accounting for their interrelationships."

They continue,

Developing a conceptual model is important to guide future attrition studies, integrate research findings, and foster research that is cumulative in its impact.

Without an improved understanding of the factors contributing to special education teacher attrition, the development of effective retention strategies is unlikely. (p. 271)

Brownell and Smith's model frames the various lines of inquiry for the current study. I used this model to explore the interrelations of personal and environmental factors and to attempt to encompass the variety of factors contributing to the participants' perceptions and reflections of their experiences (Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999; Price & McCallum, 2015). The model includes the following delineation of levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Brownell & Smith, 1993):

1. *Micro-system*: the teacher's immediate setting, classroom, and interactions that occur as a result of student/teacher characteristics, job assignment, and class size.
2. *Meso-system*: interrelations among teacher workplace variables including collegiality and administrative support.
3. *Exo-system*: formal and informal social structures influencing the teacher workplace including socioeconomic level of the school community and the nature of the district.
4. *Macro-system*: cultural beliefs and ideologies of the dominant culture as well as economic conditions that impact schools and the decisions of teachers.

This model facilitated my cognitive approach to data collection and analysis consistent with Brownell and Smith's initial (1993) hypothesis which posited that individual historical and external factors as well as environmental interactions contribute to teachers' integration into the workplace and subsequent career decisions (i.e. attrition or retention). The current study continued the initial intent of the developers to situate phenomenological data in a framework that facilitated a systematic perspective when exploring the participants' perspectives.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a macrotheory of human development. As such, it addresses "...such basic issues as personality development, self-regulation, universal psychological needs, life goals and aspirations, energy and vitality, nonconscious processes, the relations of culture to motivation, and the impact of social environments on motivation, affect, behavior, and well-being" (Deci & Ryan, 2008, p. 182). The relative satisfaction of individuals' basic psychological needs, i.e. autonomy, competence, and relatedness, contribute to their intrinsic motivation to act in self-determined ways (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). Autonomy refers to an individual's perception of self-origination of behavior. One who is acting autonomously is doing so in a self-initiating and self-regulated manner (Deci et al., 1991, Ryan & Deci, 2002). Competence refers to an individual's understanding of how to attain desired outcomes as well as his or her feelings of effectiveness in ongoing social interactions (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Relatedness is a base of connectedness and is essential for integrated health. Relatedness does not require specific outcomes; rather, it

concerns the psychological sense of being securely in commune or unity with others, which is regarded as requisite for intrinsic motivation.

The relative fulfillment of the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness affect the innate growth tendency (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Ryan and Deci (2002) comment, “To the extent that an aspect of the social context allows need fulfillment, it yields engagement, mastery, and synthesis; whereas, to the extent that it thwarts need fulfillment, it diminishes the individuals’ motivation, growth, integrity, and well-being” (p. 9). The conceptualization of these needs and their interconnected relationship was crucial to understanding the experiences of teachers. These dimensions were recognizable in the recollections of lived experiences of the participants and appeared to have a bearing on their sense of well-being, effectiveness, and in a limited way, their development as teachers.

An Integrated Approach

I have presented relevant literature demonstrating the psychological dimensions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness with pertinent associations. These were recognizable trends that helped to frame my thinking. Autonomy requires competence, which may be recognized as self-efficacy or preparedness on the part of the educator. Competence is formed through preparation and through experience (Cordeau, 2003; Cuddapah & Burtin, 2012; Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002; Flores, Desjean-Perrotta, & Steinmetz, 2004; Schonfeld & Feinman, 2012). When competence is increased, autonomous, self-directed behaviors are more regular. Teacher-efficacy, therefore, increases with experience promoting increased job-satisfaction (Aldrige & Fraser, 2016; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Steca, 2003; Malinen & Savolainen,

2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Relatedness is experienced through workplace collegiality and collaboration as well as through positive peer and administrator relationships (Billingsley, 2004a, 2005). This sense of relatedness underlies and predicates the development of competence and eventually autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

I identified three studies that were particularly relevant to the current study. Sanders (2015) utilized SDT as a conceptual framework to guide her development of a theory that accounts for the sense of declining motivation, well-being, and fulfillment and its relationship to attrition. She posited that authentic work in a supported environment might decrease the probability of attrition in new teachers. A second study (Vaughan, 2005) investigated the interaction of individual and school related factors and their effect on teachers' self-determination and professional commitment. Using hierarchical linear modeling, it was found that motivational orientation, years of experience, and level of positive relationships were significantly related to teachers' perceptions of self-determination. Lastly, Rauschenfels (2000) examined the retention of SETs with a minimum of five years experience across five states to determine common personal and environmental characteristics. She found the teachers were autonomous in their respective positions and able to creatively execute their work with the support of their administrators; all developed systems that minimized the stress of excessive paperwork, overwhelming caseloads, or excessive due process procedures; and the teachers did not experience collegial isolation. Though SDT was not referenced explicitly, it may be inferred from her findings that motivation, as it relates to the fulfillment of the

psychological needs identified by SDT, may contribute to retention of special education teachers.

Economic conditions are macro-level factors. However, they affect decisions that impact every level. Were there enough traditionally certified teachers supplied via the traditional route to meet the needs of the market due to teacher attrition and population increase, then there would be no need for alternatively certified teachers. In Oklahoma specifically, however, the number of alternatively certified teachers has been increasing.

Guarino, Santibanez, and Daley (2006) explained demand and supply as, “The *demand* for teachers [is] the number of teaching positions offered at a given level of overall compensation and the *supply* of teachers [is] the number of qualified individuals willing to teach at a given level of overall compensation” (p. 174). Overall compensation, as conceptualized by these authors, included not only the material compensation of salary and benefits but also any type of reward derived from teaching such as “working conditions” and/or “personal satisfaction.” Demand was, of course, dependent on a variety of factors including the current body of qualified professionals active in the field and the needs of those being served. Supply followed the principle that “individuals will become or remain teachers if teaching represents the most attractive activity to pursue among all activities available to them” (p. 175).

An interesting and relevant corollary is the potential impact the immediate *demand* may have on the quality of the *supply*, “...standards of teacher quality [may be adjusted] according to whether teachers are in short or large supply” (Guarino et al., 2006, p. 177). One adjustment has been the incorporation of alternatively certified teachers into the market. Of this, Redding and Smith (2016) contended that, “...the

continued expansion of alternative certification is unlikely to be a long-term solution to shortages in the teacher labor market and rather a stop-gap solution to fill in-demand positions in hard-to-staff schools” (p. 1087). At the time of this study, however, it was a process regularly and widely utilized by states.

The Market

Demand

As anticipated by many (Brownell et al., 2002; Demonte, 2015; Ingersoll, 2001; McKleskey et al., 2004), the demand for highly qualified teachers has been great and the supply insufficient. Fewer high school students have been expressing interest in pursuing teaching as a profession and fewer individuals have been enrolling in traditional teacher preparation programs (Aragon, 2016). Furthermore, special education experts have highlighted the recurrent and pervasive need for special education teachers (Billingsley, 2005; Boe & Cook, 2006; McLeskey et al., 2004). McKleskey et al. (2004) commented, “...there are no indications that the shortage of fully certified personnel will abate in the near future” (p. 7). As verification of this statement, both national and state registries have consistently identified special education as an area in which teachers are consistently in high demand. In a recent report that includes shortages by state from the year 1990 to the present, special education has been identified as a shortage area for Oklahoma in 17 of the 26 years (note: no reports were submitted for two of those years) (Cross, 2016). Additionally, a continuous need was reported for the last 5 years consecutively (2012-2016). Another report indicated that 51% of all districts and 90% of high poverty districts nationally have had difficulty recruiting highly-qualified special education teachers (Angelo, 2011). Of particular interest to this study was the need for

highly qualified special education teachers to serve in rural areas (Aragon, 2016; Berry, Petrin, Gravelle, & Farmer, 2012).

Supply

Teacher shortages could be addressed through recruitment or retention (Woods, 2016). In Oklahoma, a variety of steps have been taken to address the supply deficits. In 2013, the Oklahoma State Department of Education convened the *Oklahoma Educator Workforce Shortage Task Force* to examine the issue and make proposals to ameliorate the pervasive systemic issues relating to recruitment and retention. In the initial report (2014), the task force identified three purposes: support and retain effective educators; encourage continuous professional growth of all educators; and recruit highly capable people into the education profession. Their recommendations included (a) restructure the intern and induction processes to better facilitate professional growth and continuity of support, (b) provide systematic and ongoing professional development, (c) make adjustments to compensation of all teachers to establish a competitive salary as well as opportunities for career advancement, (d) find ways to scale successful alternative programs, and (e) determine whether additional recruitment strategies were needed.

In a subsequent report, the consortium issued a variety of legislative recommendations intended to “address the enormous and historic challenge...for curbing the statewide teacher shortage crisis” (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2015, p. 1). One recommendation encouraged the establishment and funding of a teacher recruitment model that would target not only high school students and undergraduates but also mid-career professionals and military personnel—that is, non-traditional teachers who would be alternatively certified. While these recommendations appeared to have

stalled at the legislative level, they indicate an awareness and intention on the part of community stakeholders to mitigate supply deficits. Alternative certification was intended for that purpose. However, provisions have not been comprehensively articulated or legislatively instituted which would ensure adequate mentorship or professional development of newly certified teachers. Thus, their development was occurring unsystematically through the continuing education requirements (discussed below), *on-the-job* experience, and through unregulated efforts on the part of local education agencies which varied considerably. These inconsistencies were problematic.

Traditional certification. Traditional certification of teachers may be understood as a formal pathway by which teachers achieve licensure and thereby qualification to teach. Licensure is a constraint. A license signifies a minimum level of competency that must be attained in order to perform certain tasks or be employed in certain capacities, and consequently restricts those who can perform those tasks or be employed in those capacities (Kleiner, 2000). An estimated 29% of the United States workforce is comprised of individuals who are required to have a license (Shuls & Trivitt, 2015). Of those, teachers make up the largest cohort requiring licensure (Kleiner, 2000; Kleiner & Krueger, 2010; Sass, 2015). Of the teacher certificate, LaBue (1960) remarks:

Fundamentally, a teaching certificate is an attempt to guarantee that teachers who teach in the public schools are qualified to perform their duties. The idea that the nature and quality of education is determined largely by the ability and preparation of teachers is the primary assumption on which certification is based.

(p. 147)

In the early twentieth century, teacher certification translated to completing a degree through a teacher education program rather than passing a subject-matter examination. At that time, the emphasis moved from subject knowledge to pedagogical knowledge (LaBue, 1960; Ravitch, 2002). Typically, traditional certification has continued to include a four-year undergraduate degree or a graduate degree in a specified area of study (e.g. elementary education, special education, secondary science education). Additionally, accredited teacher education institutions have required admission into a teacher preparation program with rigorous expectations and requirements for completion. Only through satisfactory completion of the program requirements is a student eligible for certification. Teacher-candidates are required to complete specific coursework, participate in an extended supervised internship, and pass state-specific competency exams. Darling-Hammond (2000) and Berliner (2000) argued that traditional teacher preparation programs benefit participants by increasing program completers' confidence and competence, which in turn correlates to student success. Additionally, Rots, Aelterman, and Devos (2014) contended that programs that produce effective teachers increase the likelihood of entrance into the profession and ultimate retention of those teachers.

Alternative certification. “Our nation’s schools are desperate for competent teachers,” stated Dr. Frederick M. Hess in his introductory statement for a lecture given at the *White House Conference on Preparing Tomorrow’s Teachers* (2002) in which he argued for “a radical overhaul of teacher certification.” Alternative certification is an umbrella term used to identify teachers who do not follow a traditional route to teacher certification via a prescribed undergraduate or graduate degree program. Alternative

routes are state-defined routes through which individuals who hold a Bachelor's degree can obtain certification without a degree in education (Feistritzer, 2011). Feistritzer (2008) clarified that alternative routes to certification were intended to provide guidelines and pathways for recruitment, selection, and training in line with specific market needs. Woods (2016) identified alternative certification as one of the means whereby states have been addressing teacher shortages.

General information. According to data from the 2011-12 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), approximately one quarter of early career teachers (those with two to three years of experience) then active entered the profession through an alternate route (Redding & Smith, 2016). Unruh and Holt (2010), Feistritzer (2008, 2011), and Kee (2012) reported similar proportions. Feistritzer (2011) further delineated the data indicating that nearly 97% of teachers who entered the profession before 1980 were traditionally certified either through completing an undergraduate (88%) or graduate (9%) degree by way of a campus-based education preparation program or education major; whereas, between 2005 and 2010, four out of every ten new hires were routed through alternative preparation programs. As noted previously, the need for non-traditionally certified teachers was due, in part, to systemic issues relating to recruiting teachers into traditional programs commensurate to the demand for highly qualified teachers. Alternatively certified teachers often do not have the benefit of direct instruction in pedagogical practices or supervised internships routinely provided through traditional programs.

As noted above, 97% of teachers who entered the profession before 1980 were traditionally certified. In the mid-1980s, according to Feistritzer (2008), New Jersey,

California, and Texas created the first alternate routes to teaching specifically to attract high quality candidates and to accommodate the needs of the market. In 2006, 130 alternative certification routes had been established by states, and 485 different programs were facilitating participant completion of these routes. As of 2008, every state had at least one alternate route to certification. It is estimated that 59,000 new teachers were alternatively certified by way of these various routes in 2008-09 compared to 275 in 1985-86 (Feistritzer, 2011). According to the most recent data provided by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2014), the total number of active teachers entering through an alternative certification program for the 2011/2012 school year was 14.6% of the total active teacher population compared to 13.2% in 2007-08. Remarkably, Feistritzer (2008) stated that more than half of the teachers who enter teaching through an alternate route were trained as special education teachers compared to 38% of all teachers. No data could be found to corroborate this claim.

Characteristics. As there are a variety of routes whereby a person can attain alternative certification and contingencies dependent upon the specific context in which a teacher is employed, the literature characterizing alternatively certified teachers varies. However, there are several noteworthy points. Alternatively certified teachers (AC), compared to traditionally certified teachers (TC), have a higher incidence of male participants, a higher inclusion of minorities, tend to be 30 or older upon entrance, are more often assigned to teach in-demand subjects (i.e. math, science, special education), and are frequently placed in urban settings (Redding & Smith, 2016; Sass, 2011; Woods, 2016). Some of these characteristics are a direct result of recruiting strategies employed by specific programs. According to a report issued by the USDE (Constantine et al.,

2009), there is no apparent distinction between AC and TC teachers with regard to college entrance exam scores, the selectivity of their respective colleges, or their level of educational attainment. Other studies have contradicted these findings, indicating that AC teachers were more likely to be from competitive universities (Boyd et al., 2006; Glazerman et al., 2006; Kane et al., 2008) and were more likely to score higher on the SAT (Sass, 2011, 2015) and on licensure exams (Boyd et al., 2006; Boyd et al., 2008). The inconsistencies of these findings may be attributable to the sampling techniques that focused on specific alternative routes—namely, Teach for America (TFA), NYC Teaching Fellows (Fellows), and American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE) (Sass, 2011, 2015). Finally, AC teachers were more likely to have worked outside of the field of education than their TC counterparts (Redding & Smith, 2016).

A study conducted by Cohen-Vogel and Smith (2007) contradicted four of the core assumptions embedded in the arguments for expanding alternative certification programs. The assumptions were: attracting experienced, outside candidates; attracting top-quality candidates; disproportionate training of teachers for hard-to-staff schools; and the alleviation of out-of-field teaching (i.e. teaching without certification or without a major in the assigned area). Their findings indicated that AC and TC differed little in terms of characteristics, that there were not a disproportionate number of candidates in hard-to-staff schools, nor did AC programs address substantially out-of-field teaching. The fact that the data analyzed was from the 1999-2000 SASS report may partially explain the differences. It may be that at that time fewer organizations were systematically exercising methods that addressed or supported these core assumptions.

However, this again supports the instability of the field and inconsistencies of the findings relating to AC teachers.

According to Constantine et al. (2009), there was no significant statistical difference in the performance of AC teachers compared to TC teachers with regard to student learning outcomes. However, program features impacting variation was reported. For instance, AC teachers who participated in TFA, which tends to draw candidates from more selective universities, have been shown to be as effective or more effective than TC teachers in raising student achievement (Shuls & Trivitt, 2015). In math, they were slightly more effective than their TC counterparts; however, their English language arts (ELA) instruction was equally effective (Kane, Rockoff, and Staiger, 2008). Fellows were initially found to be less effective than TC teachers in both math and ELA instruction. However, when statistical controls were added to the analytical model, the results regulated, which possibly indicates the classes of the sampled teachers were initially lower-achieving (Sass, 2015). The consensus in the most recent literature was that AC and TC teachers were comparable in terms of effectively supporting student achievement, with differences diminishing as teachers become more experienced (Constantine et al., 2009; Sass, 2011, 2015; Shuls & Trivitt, 2015). Collectively, these findings highlight that while specific programs do seem to evince specific characteristics and typical outcomes, very few generalizations can be made from extant research. From a review of the literature, it is evident that much depends on the context, the parameters of employment, levels of support and integration, as well as work conditions and personal characteristics.

The Center for Education Policy and Stanford Research Institute conducted a comprehensive study of alternative teacher certification programs from different regions of the United States between 2001 and 2005 (Humphrey, Weshsler, & Hough, 2008). Their findings, while informative, are largely descriptive. They found that effective AC programs placed candidates in schools that had strong leadership, a collegial atmosphere, and provided adequate materials. Additionally, effective AC programs selected well-educated individuals or “work[ed] to strengthen subject matter knowledge,” recognized previous classroom experience as an asset, and “carefully constructed and timely coursework tailored to the candidate’s background and school context” (p. 2). Finally, effective AC programs provided mentors who worked closely with the candidates and assisted in the preparation of lessons and modeled their execution as well as frequently observed and provided feedback and resources (e.g. curricula). Again, while this study characterized effective programs, their purposive sampling included only 7 selective and well-established programs; thus, the findings are limited.

Another point of particular interest to the current study related to teachers' perceptions of preparedness and teaching efficacy, which correspond to competence in self-determination theory. Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow (2002) surveyed 3000 beginning teachers in New York City, finding that those who were traditionally trained felt significantly more prepared than those who entered through alternate routes. Furthermore, they found that teachers' perceptions of preparedness correlated to their sense of teaching efficacy, their sense of responsibility for student learning, and their intent to continue in teaching. Flores, Desjean-Perrotta, and Steinmetz (2004) similarly found differences between AC and TC teachers' sense of self-efficacy. They found that

TC teachers reported greater confidence in their teaching ability. The researchers attributed to the pedagogical training these teachers received in their preparation. Further, they contended that teachers' self-efficacy perceptions were modulated by certification route, specialization area, and years of teaching experience. This is consistent with the formerly cited findings that teachers' efficacy (with respect to their students' academic success) between AC and TC teachers regulates with time (Sass, 2015; Shuls & Trivitt, 2015). Kee (2012) also found that first-year AC teachers felt less prepared than TC teachers and that their sense of unpreparedness was related to having had fewer types of education coursework and shorter field experiences. Similar results were reported in the work of Cordeau (2003), Cuddapah and Burtin (2012), and Schonfeld and Feinman (2012).

Feistritzer (2011) presented data that seemingly contradicts the above research. In the report, *Profile of Teachers in the U.S. 2011*, she reported that more beginning AC teachers were found to feel "very competent" than their TC colleagues in the following areas: ability to teach subject matter, dealing with fellow teachers, ability to motivate students, organizing instruction, dealing with administrative hierarchy, classroom management, ability to manage time, and classroom discipline. The same study also revealed that in a subsequent survey of more experienced teachers, AC teachers rated themselves lower than their TC colleagues. It is possible that the difference was simply one of inaccurate initial expectations. Program differences may have contributed to the variation. Whatever the reason, it reveals there are mixed results with respect to AC teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness.

Attrition of AC teachers compared to TC teachers has been well reported, though the results vary. A variety of factors have contributed to attrition including working conditions, such as class size and workload, administrative support, staff collegiality, and student discipline problems (Redding & Smith, 2016). The concern is that AC teachers are more likely to leave the teaching profession voluntarily than TC teachers (Christophel, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001; McLeskey et al., 2004; Redding & Smith, 2016). Comparing data from 1999-2000 school year and 2011-12, Redding and Smith (2016) found that not only did AC teachers leave at a higher rate, but they also were less likely to have practiced teaching or taken a preparatory course in teaching methods. This lack of experience and formal training may have contributed to feelings of unpreparedness in their first year of teaching as well as a lower sense of efficacy regarding their ability to manage classroom behavior or to address students' learning needs adequately. Redding and Smith (2016) posited that without a strong feeling of efficacy, the likelihood that AC teachers may leave the teaching profession increased.

I found only one study from Oklahoma involving an examination of AC teachers (Simmons, 2004, 2005). Her qualitative study ($N=18$) produced findings similar to those previously discussed but did not include special education teachers. Of particular note was her finding that teachers' professional identity developed over time and was related to efficacy in the classroom and affirmation from their peers. Additionally, she found school climate, bolstered by collegiality and administrator support, was a significant factor. No other studies have been identified in the immediate or similar context in which the current study was conducted.

Special Education. Literature that included an examination of alternatively certified special education teachers is limited (Quigney, 2010; Wasburn-Moses & Rosenberg, 2008). Yet, alternative routes to certification are becoming increasingly more prominent. L. deBettencourt and Howard (2004) note that insufficient supply of new special education teachers, increasing enrollment of special education students, and high attrition of special education teachers has contributed to the present need for alternative certification. So, by necessity and intent, special education teachers are being alternatively certified. However, these routes may increase the volume of teachers entering the field but do not ensure adequate training or professional development of those who choose to pursue them. Of this, Brownell et al. (2002) remarks, “Special education is facing the daunting challenge of increasing the supply of teachers while simultaneously upgrading its quality” (p. 1).

Quigney (2010) decried the paucity of evidence-based studies examining alternatively certified special education teachers noting the variety of routes and the diversity of programs make determining essential features and the success thereof difficult. Billingsley, too, commented on the need for continuing research in this area (personal communication, November 17, 2016). In Rosenberg and Sindelar’s (2005) critical review of the literature pertaining to the proliferation of alternative routes to special education certification, they identified six program evaluations that largely examined program completion. Only three of the evaluations examined teacher performance and each used a different scale, making comparisons difficult if not impossible. Four studies were identified comparing TC and AC teachers, but the results were inconsistent.

Rosenberg and Sindelar (2005) further highlighted several points recognized as indicators of effectiveness including: meaningful collaboration between the institution of higher education (IHE) and local education agency (LEA), adequate program length with a variety of learning activities, and substantial, ongoing supervision provided by either an IHE representative or LEA mentor. They concluded by arguing for a comprehensive and coordinated examination of the various alternate paths to certification cautioning, “Until research strengthens our understanding of effective teacher preparation, it behooves us to move ahead on the alternative route to certification agenda cautiously” (p. 125). Others have expressed similar concerns (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002; Quigney, 2010).

Work has continued, but without evident coordination and has not been comprehensive. Alternatively certified special education teachers have been included in several larger studies that sample national databases (Cohen-Vogel & Smith, 2007; Feistritzer, 2011; Redding & Smith, 2016). Additionally, specific program reviews continued to provide valuable information regarding effective program characteristics and reported relative effectiveness outcomes (Karge & McCabe, 2014; Robertson & Singleton, 2010).

The lack of coordination and comprehensiveness in the literature has been due to the variety of programs available (Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2001, 2005). Notably, Rosenberg et al. (2007) developed a database of programs and collected essential information on specific program features. Three significant findings emerged: (a) teacher shortage appeared to be the impetus for the proliferation of programs; (b) IHEs were very involved in this enterprise; and (c) the length of preparation and support varied

considerably between programs. They recognized several additional findings relevant to this study: (a) some “rapid entry” programs did not provide adequate support; (b) the personal backgrounds of participants are important; (c) assessment of the motivation and dispositions of career-changers is necessary and may reduce attrition; and (d) those with IHE involvement provide mentors, supervised fieldwork, and nationally recognized teaching standards. Further, Quigney (2010) recommended that rather than look at programs in their entirety, researchers should examine specific program elements consistent across programs in greater depth—continuing the efforts began by Rosenberg and colleagues (2007). The current study contributed to the body of burgeoning research by examining specific programmatic aspects of two programs by which novice, alternatively certified special educators were being prepared in Oklahoma and the formal and informal structures embedded therein which influenced their development. Further, per the recommendation of Rosenberg and his colleagues (2007), data including personal characteristics of participants was collected and incorporated into the analysis.

Finally, though the research was limited, Wasburn-Moses and Rosenberg (2008) presented seven guidelines by which they intended to initiate “an ongoing process of developing and disseminating best practices” (p. 259). Their guidelines are particularly relevant to the current study because they are intended specifically for special education programs: (a) promote initial classroom survival through mentoring and techniques to enhance organization, communication, and classroom management; (b) integrate instructor-developed and student-developed topics into their continuing education; (c) require collaboration and teaming through fostering teacher-teacher interactions while providing personal and professional support; (d) emphasize the skills needed to improve

practice by developing a “stance of inquiry” and through specific action research; (e) tailor assignments to professional standards to increase familiarity and reliance upon accepted professional practice; (f) integrate instructional technology to assist with individualization of instruction and support; and (g) promote professional orientation toward teaching by “exposing candidates to multiple and varied opportunities to expand their knowledge and expertise” (p. 263). Many of these guidelines correspond to those identified by Humphrey et al. (2008). Rosenberg et al. (2007) concluded their analysis noting that “effective [alternative routes to certification in special education] are extended, rigorous, and programmatic; fast-track programs with limited support have high attrition...” (p. 234).

Teacher Retention and Attrition

Teachers stay in or leave the profession for a variety of reasons. As this study was intended, in part, to provide information about the professional development of special educators pursuing alternative routes to certification in order to improve retention, a review of the relevant research was appropriate. Special educators exit the profession at a higher rate than their general education peers (Boe et al., 1997; Boe & Cook, 2006; Christophel, 2003; Kozleski et al., 2000); alternatively certified teachers exit at a higher rate than traditionally certified teachers (Redding & Smith, 2016), and novice teachers exit at a higher rate than experienced (Gray & Taie, 2015; Ingersoll, 2003). Therefore, novice, alternatively certified special education teachers are at high risk for attrition. The following section describes reasons researchers have identified for such attrition. There are notable correspondences between reasons given by general education teachers, special education teachers, and alternatively certified general and special education

teachers. Several are distinctive to special education. The reasons special educators leave has often been categorized in three ways: (a) personal, (b) workplace related, and (c) affective responses to teaching (Billingsley, 1993; Brownell & Smith, 1992; Brownell et al., 2002).

Personal Factors

Personal factors relate to natural, voluntary attrition for reasons personal to the teacher such as a family move, pregnancy or child rearing, health, retirement (Billingsley et al., 1995) and reflect micro-level factors. Personal factors also include teacher characteristics such as age, gender, race, and necessity of occupation (i.e. primary ‘breadwinner’), as well as, teacher qualifications such as certification status (certified/uncertified), academic ability, degrees earned, and teacher preparation. While gender and race appear to have little impact on teacher retention/attrition (Billingsley, 2004b), younger special educators are more likely to leave (or express intent to leave) than older special educators (Boe et al., 1997; Cross & Billingsley, 1994; Singer, 1992). This trend has been consistent with general education teachers as well (Borman & Dowling, 2008). For both general education and special education teachers there has been a higher incidence of attrition among uncertified teachers than certified (Miller et al., 1999). Finally, it has been found that more academically capable special educators are more likely to leave teaching than those with lower performances (Frank & Keith, 1984).

Work Related Factors

Work related, or meso- and exo-system level, factors were particularly important to the current study. These included the following: school climate, problems adjusting

and role problems; lack of preparation; lack of support (peer, administrative); professional development; burnout; perceptions of low social status, salary, and, specific to special education teachers, multiple, interacting issues (Billingsley, 2004b, 2005; Brunsting et al., 2014; Fish & Stephens, 2010). Generally, those who perceived school climate positively were more likely to stay as compared to those who did not (Billingsley, 2004b; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Miller et al., 1999). Teachers in high poverty districts reported less desirable working conditions than their peers in more affluent districts, which may have impacted perceptions of school climate (Fall & Billingsley, 2011). Positively, a school climate that is collaborative, collegial, and fosters shared decision making for promoting an environment focused on learning has been shown to reduce attrition rates (Brownell et al., 2002; Leko & Smith, 2010).

Role adjustment or associated problems are frequently reported. New teachers, SET or GET, are at greater risk to leave than more experienced teachers (Boe et al., 1997; Miller et al., 1999; Singer, 1992). This may be due to role adjustment issues or simply a lack of *goodness of fit* between the personal characteristics or professional qualifications of individual and his or her placement (Lavian, 2015). Stress associated with the difficulties of adjusting to a new role can contribute to attrition (Billingsley, 2004b, 2005). Support and assistance in the form of responsive induction programs and active, helpful mentors are positively correlated to retention and can mitigate stress attendant to attrition (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Kagler, 2011; Morrison, 2010).

Lack of adequate preparation is an ongoing concern and directly relates to retention and attrition potentialities. Miller et al. (1999) found that special educators without certification are at higher risk of leaving than those with certification. While

ESEA legislation addressed this issue, a corollary exists in alternative certification whereby most teachers are concurrently enrolled or participating in their training program while teaching—that is, limited or no experience in the classroom prior to assuming the role of teacher of record. As noted previously, AC teachers have reportedly felt less prepared initially than their counterparts (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Redding & Smith, 2016). This lack of preparedness may contribute to attrition. However, those who do persist and gain more experience are more likely to stay (Cross & Billingsley, 1994). I have reviewed teacher preparation in relation to teacher development in a subsequent section.

Lack of support consistently and frequently was cited as a reason for departure from the field (Billingsley 2004b; Ingersol, 2001; Kagler, 2011; McCusker, 2009). Administrative support is critical for teachers transitioning into and adjusting to the workplace as well as throughout teachers' careers. Similarly, peer support is vital early and throughout a teacher's development (Simmons, 2004). Teachers who report lower levels of colleague support are more likely to leave than those who report higher levels (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Miller et al., 1999; Billingsley, 2004b, 2005). Conversely, Boreman & Dowling (2008), McCusker (2009), Postlethwaite (2006), and Shinn (2015) reported collegial and administrative support as key factors in teachers' decisions to stay. In the special education teacher community, feelings of isolation and perceptions of low social status pervade (Billingsley, 2005).

Gersten et al., 2001 reported a direct effect between teachers' involvement in professional development and their intent to leave and professional commitment. Development as a professional and active involvement in organized professional

development activities fosters growth and connectivity, which in turn promotes increased professional commitment and reduced role dissonance (Billingsley, 2004b).

Burnout is the resultant outcome of many interacting factors and is indicative of the system-level impact upon the individual. Brunsting et al. (2014) synthesized the available research on teacher burnout of SETs and found that teacher experience, student disability (i.e. teachers working with ED or ASD students), role conflict, role ambiguity, and lack of administrative support were the salient factors contributing to teacher burnout. Of interest to the current study was a study conducted in Oklahoma with SETs that found that teacher caseload size affected burnout by contributing to emotional exhaustion (Goetzinger, 2006). Teacher certification, teacher experience, and school size were not significant contrary to other reports indicating that these factors do contribute to attrition.

Teacher salary has personal and professional implications. Salary is determined by a variety of external factors including the region/state in which one is teaching, the resources available to the district in which one is employed, the nature of work for which one is being paid, whether one is certified or uncertified, one's performance (in some instances), and the number of years of service. Several studies indicated that teachers with lower salaries were more likely to leave the profession than their counterparts who were making more (Billingsley, 2005; Boe et al. 1997; & Miller et al., 1999). This did not take into account the cost of living nor teacher salaries relative to comparable professions and hours of employ which, according to McCluskey (2009), should have been considered. Further, teacher salary was only one dimension of influence and has a limited impact once a certain threshold is reached. Miller et al. (1999) found that teacher salary

was less predictive of attrition than school climate and perceived stress. Thus, while teacher salary is a valid point of consideration, particularly in Oklahoma where it has become highly politicized, it is but one point in a multiplicity of issues that impact teacher attrition.

Researchers report that it is not a single work related factor that contributes to teacher attrition in most cases, but rather multiple, interacting problems (Ingersoll, 2001). This pattern is particularly true in special education (Billingsley et al., 1995; Brownell et al. 1997). These problems may include: high caseloads, excessive paperwork, inadequate planning time, inadequate leadership support, teacher isolation, insufficient focus on student learning, and/or lack of instructional and technological resources (Billingsley, 2004b, 2005; Brownell et al., 2002). Individual teachers are affected by both personal and environmental conditions; the magnitude of any one factor or a combination thereof will vary based on the personal and environmental characteristics. This characteristic is consistent with Brownell and Smith's (1993) model which states that teachers' career decisions are rarely a choice between two discrete alternatives: to stay or leave. Rather, career decisions are "dynamic events" affected by many interacting factors over a period of time that ultimately result in teacher attrition or retention.

Affective Response Factors

Affective responses include stress, job satisfaction, and commitment to the profession. Affective responses may be the best indicators of self-determined behavior and the interplay of the psychological dimensions that result in specific, positive outcomes at the micro-level: namely, management of stress, high job satisfaction, and high commitment to the profession. Undesirable working conditions can contribute to

reduced commitment and job satisfaction as well as increased stress all of which contribute to the likelihood of attrition (Brownell et al., 2002). In fact, stress alone is a powerful predictor of attrition (Miller et al., 1999). Chronic stress, defined as exhaustion, powerlessness, and depersonalization (Maslach, 1982), is closely associated with burnout. Billingsley (2004b) remarks that perceptions of stress may be due to the range of students' needs and abilities, bureaucratic requirements, or conflicting expectations, goals and directives.

Job related stressors influence job related satisfaction. Adera and Bullock (2010) found that those teachers serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) who experienced high levels of stress within and outside of the classroom were likely to become dissatisfied with their work. Stressors within the classroom were outlined as: diverse skills and abilities among students, challenging and out-of-control behaviors, and inconsistencies in school expectations. Those stressors outside the classroom were ambiguity of roles and responsibilities, lack of collaboration, and lack of parental involvement. These authors reported that the cumulative effect of these stressors over time influenced teachers' decisions to stay or leave. The impact of micro-, meso-, and exo-level system factors is evident.

These findings were consistent with Stempien and Loeb (2002) who compared GETs and SETs who serve EBD students and found that special education teachers were more likely to express job dissatisfaction. They noted in their discussion that frustration manifests negatively in two distinct ways: in withdrawal and ultimate removal (leaving) or staying and suffering while coping with the high stress and continual dissatisfaction with the work (i.e. staying because one must—not because one genuinely desires to stay).

Neither case is optimal. Billingsley (2004b) recommends attention to collegial development, implementation of intentional stress management strategies or organizational adjustments, clarification of roles, and the provision of professional support to increase job satisfaction and reduce the potential for attrition.

Finally, commitment to the profession has been associated with increased retention. Special educators who report higher commitment display corollaries to other positive features of stable teachers including fewer role problems, lower levels of stress, more teaching experience, and higher levels of job satisfaction (Billingsley, 2004b). Experience in the classroom is linked to higher levels of commitment (Brownell et al., 2002; Cross & Billingsley, 1994). Sindelar et al. (2010) argued that capacity and commitment should be the focus of future research as focusing on these qualitative characteristics is more likely to have a positive impact upon the field than mere a quantitative conceptualization of the issue of retention and attrition. They commented, “We special education teacher educators are sincerely concerned about the competence of our graduates—perhaps more so than we are concerned about the number we graduate” (p. 12). Brunsting et al. (2014) also noted that developing capacity and commitment to the profession alleviates burnout and therefore has the potential to reduce attrition.

Recommendations for Retention

It might be assumed that retention could be affected by a simple reversal of those factors that contribute to attrition. To some degree, the recommendations that follow do amount to such a reversal. Furthermore, it might be assumed that retention factors that apply to certain groups of teachers would apply to all teachers. Again, to some degree this is accurate. However, in both instances, the first for its infeasibility and vagueness

and the second for its homogenous grouping of distinct sub-groups with specific needs and characteristics, it is not entirely so. Generally, one may find measures in place intended to obviate the attrition of teachers throughout the nation, in various states and schools, sometimes locally organized and sometimes institutionally organized. However, there is no uniformity to those measures nor consistency in their implementation.

Furthermore, many of the recommendations found in the literature are descriptions of teachers who were retained versus productive measures to retain teachers. For instance, Boe et al. (1997) recommends hiring experienced teachers (ages 35-55) who have dependent children. Additionally, they recommend placing these teachers in full-time assignments for which they are fully certified, and paying them high salaries. Elsewhere, Boe, et al. (2008) recommended increasing the supply of qualified teachers. These recommendations are useful insofar as they identify commonalities amongst retained teachers and provide a simple solution to teacher shortages and system instability; however, they are impracticable when considering market limitations.

Thus, for this study, several recommendations were identified as critical both to special education and alternatively certified teachers. These were considered as indicators of the nature of the participants' work environment and the level of support they received. Billingsley (2004a) recommended four specific retention-enhancing factors, which could serve to "cultivate qualified special educators by providing the conditions in which they can thrive and grow professionally" (p. 370). These included: responsive induction programs, deliberate role design, positive work conditions and supports, and professional development. Leko and Smith (2010) identified these same factors as being instrumental in retaining special education teachers.

According to Billingsley (2004a), responsive induction programs (a) work to establish hospitable working environments with appropriate supports; (b) seek to bring about a “good job match” which entails pairing teachers’ abilities and strengths in a complimentary fashion to the job assignment; (c) moderate teacher workload; and (d) provide experienced and well-trained mentors who are available and attentive to the needs of the mentee. Deliberate role design is intended to reduce anxiety and stress related to the variety of stressors that can arise through *role ambiguity* (necessary information is unavailable to do the work), *role conflict* (inconsistent behavioral expectations), *role dissonance* (variation between teacher’s expectations and others), and *role overload* (simply having more to do than is reasonably manageable). Role design is intended to provide clarity about job responsibilities and to ensure that teachers are adequately equipped to perform those jobs.

Positive work conditions and supports are similarly important. Oftentimes, these are centrally dependent upon the leaders/administrators with whom the teacher is involved. As Billingsley (2005) noted, teachers indicate that supportive leaders (principals) are the foremost incentive for remaining in special education. Supportive leaders provide both emotional and instrumental support. Furthermore, leaders have the ability to foster collaborative and collegial work environments that promote positive interpersonal relationships and commitment both to the immediate people and place as well as the profession. Finally, professional development is essential to the professional growth of the novice and experienced teacher alike. Gersten et al. (2001) found that access to professional development opportunities has a direct influence upon SETs commitment to the profession and indirectly upon their intent to stay or leave. This is

consistent with Berry and her colleagues' (2012) findings that identified the need for specific professional development in rural communities. Again, Billingsley argued that for special educators to be effective, "...they need the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for teaching students with disabilities [as well as] the structures, resources, and supports necessary to carry out their responsibilities" (2005, p. 3).

While the primary focus in the current study was upon the four retention-enhancing factors described above, that is, their perceptible instantiation and participants' perceptions of consequence, many of the recommendations were intended to be utilized by selective programs (Feistritzer, 2008; Karge & McCabe, 2014; Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005). These include a variety of program specific indicators, such as high entrance standards, program length and rigor, standards-based curriculum, and program evaluation. However, researchers also recommend including extensive mentoring and supervision, pedagogical training, and meaningful collaboration, which correspond to those above.

Perhaps most relevant to the current study were the anecdotal remarks offered by successful AC teachers. Jorissen (2003) found that successful AC teachers working in an urban district benefitted most from both professional relationships with their mentors or experienced teachers and with members of their cohort. Incidentally, this is supported in SDT literature as well (Beachboard, Beachboard, Li, & Adkison, 2011). Jorissen (2003) also found that the dispositions of the participants were respectful and attentive to those who demonstrated best practices in teaching. Participants' competence developed over time and involved observation, practice, and application with feedback from their mentors. The mentors and mentees were mutually receptive and reciprocating. These

findings enhance our understanding of retention-enhancing factors. Finally, Cuddapah and Burtin (2012) also collected anecdotal data which revealed that novice AC teachers desire opportunities to learn from experts, guidance on how to teach content, logistical assistance, experience with students prior to teaching, help managing expectations, and time for reflection. Teacher retention as a function of teacher development was one of the primary foci of this study.

Teacher Development

Formal teacher development for beginning or early career teachers has been primarily presented in two forms in the literature: induction and mentoring. Induction practices included prescribed, structured activities and supports intended to provide guidance and orientation to the work and workplace. The definition and function of a mentor in the educational context varied considerably from site to site unless specific expectations were set forth and monitored by a regulating body (e.g. local education agency, state education agency). Even then, fidelity of implementation can vary (O'Connor, Malow, & Bisland, 2011). Nonetheless, both induction and mentoring, if successfully executed, can improve teacher commitment and retention, teacher use of classroom instructional practices, and student achievement (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Furthermore, effective mentoring and induction may contribute to a teacher's sense of relatedness and competence thereby bolstering his/her resilience and well-being as well as facilitating growth (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, & Ryan, 2000).

As discussed above, development as professionals was instrumental to the advancement of a teacher's commitment and competence (Billingsley, 2005; Gersten et al., 2001). Mentoring and induction are constituent parts, as well as ancillary supports of

the larger structure that perpetuates this development. Several studies have explicitly articulated the connection (Billingsley, 2004a, 2005). In a study introduced previously, Simmons (2004, 2005) sampled “successful” alternatively certified teachers in Oklahoma. For her sample, development as professionals was regarded as multi-faceted and variable depending on their needs. The participants reported slow growth as they accustomed themselves to their environment; however, with their mentors guiding and pacing them, they were able to take advantage of the formal professional development opportunities in their district. Doing so allowed them to improve their competence and skillfulness as teachers, illustrating how mentoring and formal induction practices as part of a developmental framework can promote growth.

Consistently, effective mentoring and induction enhances teachers’ capacity to do their work and to do it well—that is, with increasing proficiency (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Ultimately, growth in professionalism leads to identify oneself as a professional; identity and legitimacy correspond (Newberry, 2014). This progression is paramount to assuring continuance in the profession as well as effective, competent practice (Hong, 2010). The literature contends that alternatively certified and special education teachers benefit from extended and intentional developmental practices (including induction and mentoring) that accommodate for specific personal and contextual needs (Billingsley, 2004a, 2005; Griffiths, 2011; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Kee, 2012; Newberry, 2014; O’Connor et al., 2011). Providing this level of support increases professional commitment, which in turn correlates to professional identity development (Hong, 2010; Jarvis-Selinger, Pratt, & Collins, 2010). The developed teacher is a stable teacher. The

stable teacher has the potential to stabilize a system in continuous flux—thus both the individual and the system, due to the interrelations between, may derive benefit.

Summary

Billingsley (1993) hypothesized that when teachers are insufficiently qualified and their work conditions are unfavorable, they are likely to experience fewer rewards at a personal level and therefore their commitment to the profession will be reduced. Elsewhere, she has remarked, “A holistic view of special educators’ work conditions is needed to sustain special educators’ commitment to their work and to make it possible for teachers to use their expertise” (Billingsley, 2004a, p. 371). The intention of this review has been to present literature from the various distinct though interconnected pools of research that converge within this study. Examining research about the supply of teachers and the recurring shortages helps to explain the resulting influx of alternatively certified teachers. Alternatively certified teachers are as varied as the multitude of programs routing them into the market and subsequently into the classroom. Their susceptibility to work-related risk-factors leading to higher attrition rates was supported in the literature—though not without detractors. Further, special education teachers are similarly at-risk. Thus, novice, alternatively certified special education teachers begin their work significantly at risk for attrition. Material and human resources are the primary cost—systemic stability is the secondary and, perhaps, more substantial. Personal, work, and affective factors are interrelated and contribute to teachers’ decisions to persist in the field. Moreover, retention-enhancing factors may reduce the predilection to leave by moderating negative aspects of the work. Teacher development stabilizes the

individual as he/she comes to identify as a professional and has the potential to stabilize a system in continuous flux.

Ultimately, teachers, specifically NACSETs, are individuals with specific needs, nested in a multi-layered system. The degree to which the system fulfills those needs, either directly or indirectly, contributes to their effectiveness, well-being and, presumably, development as professionals. This study explores teachers' perceptions of these factors.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, I employed the qualitative, multiple case study (Stake, 2006) approach to explore novice, alternatively certified special education teachers' (NACSET) perceptions of their transition and development as professionals. Guided by the purpose and research questions (Patton, 2002), I examined participants' perceptions in a contextually-rooted manner through in-depth interviews, observations of selected teachers and their training program, and analysis of relevant artifacts. Stake (2006) emphasized, "Qualitative case study was developed to study the experience of real cases operating in real situations" (p. 3). The following describes the methodological process with contextual and situational explanations provided where appropriate.

Theoretical Perspective

For the purposes of this study, I approached the collection and analysis of data from the constructionist, interpretivist perspective (Crotty, 1998). As such, meaning was derived from both the participants' perceptions of reality as well as my own constructed interpretations of those presentations. Claims, though trustworthy, are subjective and limited by the extent of the perspectives presented. Meaning was derived from participants' accounts and actual experiencing of the contexts and processes of development. "Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement

with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed” (Crotty, 1998, p. 9).

Research Questions

Research questions provided guidance to the process of investigation (Patton, 2002). Consistent with Agee (2009) who noted that initial questions are “provisional” and “generative,” the research questions for the current study were refined throughout the investigation. The present iteration reflects the questions that guided the latter stages of analysis.

1. How do novice, alternatively certified special education teachers perceive their development as professionals in Oklahoma?
2. What factors are contributing to or detracting from novice, alternatively certified special education teachers’ development of *capacity* and *commitment* in Oklahoma?

Research Design

I conducted a qualitative case study (Stake, 2006). The purpose of this study warranted the depth and detail (Stake, 1998) case study research generates. Data included in-depth semi-structured interviews, demographic information, selective follow-up interviews, observational data, and artifacts in the form of course documents, course reflections, correspondence, instructional materials, and pictures of selected participants’ classrooms. As transcription is instrumental to analysis (Poindexter, 2002), I personally transcribed all interview data. Participants had an opportunity to review, amend, and append the initial transcripts. Analysis of interviews, artifacts, and field notes was ongoing throughout the duration of the study. This too, was methodologically

appropriate in that it “improves both the quality of the data collected and the quality of the analysis...” (Patton, 2002, p. 437). As mentioned above, I conducted follow-up interviews with seven of the nine participants. Follow-up interviews provided an opportunity to member-check, revisit any evident gaps in the case-record, and pursue emergent lines of inquiry. I chose to conduct follow-up interviews with the seven participants who participated in the boot camp route to certification. Analysis continued with the development of individual case-records, which entailed compilation and categorical organization of the data. I then analyzed each case as a “specific, unique, bounded system” (Stake, 1998). Each case represented an initial unit of analysis. Subsequently, I reconstituted the individual cases into a composite and conducted cross-case analysis. Themes were identified inductively and substantiated. Adherence to methodological principles (Stake, 2006), triangulation of the data sources (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Patton, 2002), member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and peer debriefing and review (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Patton, 2002) strengthened the claims. The whole of the process was guided by the purpose of the study and the research questions (Patton, 2002).

Participants and Setting

The nine individuals purposively selected to participate in this study were teachers who were active within one year from the time the study was initiated and had completed, or were in the process of completing, their certification process through one of two alternative routes: Career Development Program for Paraprofessionals (para-to-teacher) or Non-Traditional Special Education Certification (boot camp). The Career Development Program for Paraprofessionals allowed those individuals who had

previously worked as a paraprofessional in a school setting to transition into the classroom as the teacher of record. The two individuals pursuing this route were expected to have a baccalaureate degree and at least one year of documented service as a paraprofessional. Further, program participants had to pass three exams prior to entry into the classroom: the Oklahoma General Education Test (OGET), special education Oklahoma Subject Area Test (OSAT) for certification in either Mild-Moderate or Severe-Profound disabilities, and the Oklahoma Professional Teaching Exam (OPTE). Within three years of the initial issuance of the provisional certificate (renewed annually), they were required to complete 12 semester hours of additional training at an accredited institution of higher education with three of those hours in reading instruction. All requirements had to be completed to be eligible for standard certification (Career Development Program, 2016).

Seven of the participants participated in the Non-Traditional Special Education Certification route. Candidates pursuing this route had to meet the following requirements: (a) hold at minimum a baccalaureate degree with a 2.75 GPA; (b) obtain the recommendation of an institution of higher education or a local district representative; (c) *commit* to complete a Master's degree or standard certification in special education; and (d) complete a 150-hour program that includes 120 hours of special education training, known as boot camp, and 30 hours of field experience. Once candidates complete the above requirements, they were provisionally certified. Subsequently, they were required (a) to complete a minimum of six college semester hours per year of professional education coursework while provisionally certified until they had completed a total of 18 credit hours; (b) pass the OGET, OSAT for certification in either Mild-

Moderate or Severe-Profound disabilities, and the OPTE; and (c) satisfy all of the above requirements within three years of initial certification (Non-Traditional Route, n.d.).

The boot camp model, “fast-track” (Rosenberg et al., 2007), involved a 10-week period of intensive training which included five, one-day seminars and 10 to 15 hours of specialized coursework weekly in addition to the observation hours. At the conclusion of the 10-week training period, the program discontinued support with the implicit expectation that institutions of higher education (IHE) and local education agencies (LEA) would provide the necessary support for transition. In addition, the boot camp model required that program participants pass the OGET, appropriate OSAT, and OPTE within three years of completing their initial training.

I purposively solicited nine individuals who had taught for three or fewer years to participate in this study. As such, the participants were, by accepted definition, novices (Berliner, 1994, 2000). Nine cases allowed for the collection of sufficient data to conduct robust cross-case analysis. Stake (2006) noted that fewer (2 or 3) may not provide enough “interactivity” and more (15 or 30) may provide more “uniqueness or interactivity than the research team and readers can come to understand” (p. 22). The participants taught in either rural communities or an “Urban Cluster” in Oklahoma (US Census Bureau, 2010); four taught in rural communities; four taught in the larger community; one taught in both contexts. I intentionally solicited individuals teaching in the two types of settings to diversify the experiences represented as well as to look for commonalities. This is consistent with Stake’s (2006) recommendation to examine how the “program or phenomenon appears in different contexts” (p. 27). Each varied in his or her personal and professional history. Four had worked previously as special education

paraprofessionals. Three had no prior teaching experience. All were employed in other fields prior to entering the teaching profession. The demographic characteristics of the participants do not compare to the cumulative national data Rosenberg and his colleagues (2007) compiled, which examined various programmatic and participant variables. However, they reflect population characteristics and professional trends in the context where the study was conducted. Table 3.1 provides information relevant to the study regarding the participants program, number of years teaching at the time of participation, formal degrees, prior experience, certification exams passed, and number of continuing education hours completed.

Table 3.1
Program and Formal Training

Participant s	Program	# of Years Teaching	Formal Degrees	Prior Teaching Experience	Certification Exams: Passed	Cont. Ed. Hours
Nancy	<i>Non-Traditional</i>	.5	BS Psychology MS Counseling Psych.	None	OGET	16
Claire	<i>Non-Traditional</i>	1	BS Sociology	None	OGET	14
Stanley	<i>Non-Traditional</i>	1	BA Christian Ministry M. Divinity MS Christian Education	professor & minister	None	8
Olivia	<i>Non-Traditional</i>	2	BS Behavioral Science	None	OPTE	15
Caroline	<i>Non-Traditional</i>	2.5	BS Social Work MA Human Services MS Social Work	adjunct professor	OSAT	17
Marie	<i>Non-Traditional</i>	3	BS Criminal Justice	paraprofessional	OGET, OPTE	18
Tera	<i>Non-Traditional</i>	3	BS Social Science	paraprofessional	OGET, OSAT, OPTE	15
Vivian	<i>Para-Teacher</i>	3	B. University Studies	paraprofessional	OGET, OSAT, OPTE	6
Diane	<i>Para-Teacher</i>	3	BS Sociology	paraprofessional	OGET, OSAT, OPTE	12

Procedure

Data Collection

Upon receiving Institutional Review Board approval (Appendix A), I conducted in-depth interviews with each of the participants. I used a semi-structured questioning format (Appendix B) with open-ended questions which allowed me to ask additional probing questions associated with responses from the participants to better understand his or her perception or perspective. I conducted the initial interviews within two months of receiving approval. Each of these interviews took 60 to 90 minutes. At the initial interviews, specific personal and professional information was collected (Appendix C) in order to create a comprehensive profile of each participant. All personal identifiers were removed and the digital and physical documents coded to prevent inadvertent disclosure of identity and to maintain confidentiality. Pseudonyms were applied for the purpose of analysis. After conducting the initial interviews, transcribing those interviews, and analysis, I conducted follow-up interviews with six of the participants to assess further perceptions of development, to address gaps in the data, to seek clarification on indistinct points, to authenticate any empirical assertions developed through initial analysis, and to pursue additional lines of inquiry. The follow-up interviews were 30 to 60 minutes in length.

In addition to digitally recording the interviews, field notes were taken throughout each interview. Immediately following each interview, I drafted a brief memo describing the conditions of the interview and interviewee, possible follow-up questions I might ask at a subsequent interview, and any personal reflections or impressions about the interview that might inform either future data collection or data analysis.

As indicated above, I collected additional data in the form of artifacts to explore the teachers' perceptions of their development and to augment analysis. These artifacts were collected with the cooperation of the participants and included: course documents, preparation materials, and personal artifacts related to the process and experience of development. In addition to conducting in-depth interviews and collecting artifacts, I observed six teachers in their places of work for a minimum of two hours each. These observations provided contextual information relevant to the study, informed analysis, and provided opportunities for me to occupy and experience, however briefly, the immediate work environments of participants personally and in real time. Additionally, observing participants while teaching, their interactions with their peers and students, and examining their classrooms and instructional materials provided useful insights that allowed for thick description (Patton, 2002) of those cases.

In the formative stages of the study, each case was constructed and analyzed individually (Stake, 1998, 2006). However, during the concluding stages of the study, I performed cross-case analysis, which allowed for the consideration and inclusion of outside data sources—that is, those not immediately relatable to the individual participants. In this study, outside data sources included (a) certification materials provided by the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OKSDE), (b) field notes from observing sessions of the OKSDE boot camp, and (c) materials provided by institutions of higher education related to the study. These additional sources of data supplemented the in-depth and follow-up interviews, artifacts, and observations. As expected, the multiple forms of data collected contributed to the robustness of this study. Table 3.2 depicts the sources of data collected for each case.

Table 3.2
Data Collection Table

PARTICIPANTS	INTERVIEW	FOLLOW-UP	OBSERVATION	SUPPORTING ARTIFACTS			
				Course Doc.	Correspondence	Pictures	Other
CAROLINE	X	X		X	X		X
CLAIRE	X	X	X	X		X	X
DIANE	X		X	X		X	
MARIE	X	X	X	X		X	
NANCY	X	X		X			
OLIVIA	X	X	X	X		X	
STANLEY	X	X	X	X		X	
TERA	X	X	X		X	X	
VIVIAN	X			X			

Data Analysis

In qualitative inquiry, analysis is a continuous process (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). For the current study, analysis proceeded in the following manner. First, I transcribed interview data, noting emergent ideas. Then, I went through each interview, using first cycle coding to familiarize myself further with the data, to surface ideas inductively, and to tentatively organize codes. I used this inductive analysis to develop preliminary empirical assertions. Combining data sources, I developed case-records for each of the participants. Data from all sources (interview transcripts, field notes, artifacts) were included. Table 3.3 depicts a portion of a case record.

Table 3.3
Example of Case-Record

Category	Supporting Evidence	Source
2. <i>Goodness of Fit</i>	<p>The six weeks that I spent in a lab with the 4th and 5th grade students with severe and profound disabilities—I felt like I could handle it. But, my very next teaching assignment was too much. And I remembered, much too late, that I had been told that there were just limited numbers of those classrooms available.</p> <p>So, I think that I did not understand enough about the classroom and about the students that I would be working with as I was making decisions about what position to take next. So, when I went to a middle school, I was overwhelmed in that position. Went to a smaller school—less overwhelmed. Although there were struggles there as well because there were some students who had some pretty serious behavior problems—but it was just not nearly as intense because there were fewer students. So I think the levels of intensity just continued to increase with almost every position I took to the point that I could not meet the demands for the particular building I was in.</p> <p>I think if I had gone into those severe and profound classrooms even in the elementary school, I would still be teaching. I think if I had been working with students who needed basic skills, needed help with basic reading and math skills, I think I would still be teaching.</p>	Interview 1.1, p. 13, 14

I used Corbin and Strauss’ (2008) recursive method of comparison—comparing codes and assertions to the data. From the case-records, I constructed individual case narratives by identifying and presenting specific factors and characteristics independently represented in the individual case-records. Case narratives, ranging from 15 to 30 pages in length, synthesized the various data represented in the case-records in narrative form. This provided an additional layer of analysis. From these, I developed the case study reports (see Chapter 4) in which I attempted to thoroughly describe, in depth and detail (Stake, 1998), the unique and salient elements of the individual cases in a way that made each participant’s distinctive perspective evident. This included, in the end, features common to the group and particular to the case.

Subsequent to the development of the individual case study reports, I employed cross-case analysis (see Chapter 5) to examine the emergent themes related to the phenomenon of interest as guided by the research questions. To do so, I organized the

data in a similar fashion to that of the case-records described above except that rather than organizing by case, I organized by analytic category or construct in such a way that the compilation would entail data from all nine cases. This reduction included the following categories: certification process, community, competence, conscious of development, development, environmental factors: systemic/support, experience, formal preparation, growth orientation, mentorship, motivation, overcoming difficulties, overwhelmed, prioritizing children, professional identity formation, and sense of preparedness. These were then analyzed and themes representing a synthesis of various affiliated categories developed. I consulted educational and methodological experts throughout the period of analysis and received constructive feedback that helped shape my conclusions. The themes that emerged are trustworthy in that they were the product of a triangulation of data; further, their development is traceable (audit trail) and the progress of their development monitored by peer-review. Patton (2002) reminds us, however, that due to the nature of the study, it is likely that other researchers with different “paradigmatic lenses” (p. 543) or perspectives might arrive at different conclusions when viewing the data. I present the findings as contextually and situationally dependent, consistent with the theoretical perspective I’ve adopted for this study: I’m “...more interested in deeply understanding specific cases within a particular context than in hypothesizing about generalizations and causes across time and space” (Patton, 2002, p. 546).

Transcription. I personally transcribed all of the interviews; this process contributed to my immersion in the data and quality of the analysis (Poindexter, 2002). After transcribing each interview, the audio and written interviews were compared again

to verify accuracy. After each individual transcription of the initial interviews, a copy was delivered electronically to the respective interviewee with an opportunity to review, amend, and append. Notable affectations (e.g. laughing, long-pauses) corresponding to specific comments were noted in the transcript. Interview notes were kept and used to supplement analysis. Follow-up interviews were selectively transcribed and the data incorporated into the extant case-records. There were no member-checks on the follow-up interview transcripts due to the specificity of their function.

Coding. For this study, exploratory methods examining the transcripts in their entirety were used first to identify observable trends. I then proceeded to code the data by two distinct though interrelated means: first, simple content coding was done with the topical and affective trends that emerged, systematically ordered and categorized; second, structural coding (Saldana, 2013) was used to identify specific data relevant to the research questions. An example of the former included in vivo categories such as “figuring it out” and “I care.” An example of the latter included an examination of the basic psychological needs prescribed by self-determination theory (i.e. autonomy, competence, relatedness) in which specific language in the data suggested categorical association and was therefore codified as such. These codes provided the initial categorical structure for developing the case-records. With further analysis, I synthesized these categories and identified inclusive themes. I gave particular attention to the identification of possible non-examples (i.e. negative cases) and outlier data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002), which I pursued to deepen the analysis and strengthen the findings. The whole process was iterative and cyclical. Through constant comparison, I maintained connections between the data and emergent themes. Finally, analysis was

intentionally inductive in an effort to maintain the emic perspective as far as was possible. Structural coding is, admittedly, exogenous but was necessary in order to examine the research questions and components of the proposed theoretical framework.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1986) argue that trustworthiness and authenticity afford credibility to qualitative studies. These are achieved, as Patton (2002) notes, "...by being balanced, fair, and conscientious in taking account of multiple perspectives, multiple interests, and multiple realities" (p. 575). One way to communicate trustworthiness is through the practice of triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Stake (1998), whose conception and practice of case-study research governed many of the methodological processes outlined in this study, states that triangulation is "a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning" (p. 97). My use of multiple data sources permitted comprehensive exploration of the participants' experiences. I incorporated recognized and credible research practices to promote the trustworthiness: triangulation of data (multiple data sources), peer-debriefing and review, member checks, and deep and detailed descriptions of the participants' perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Furthermore, I have offered a self-disclosure to communicate my positionality as a researcher—the strengths it offered and the steps I took to balance my perspective.

Positionality

I formerly served as special education teacher/administrator and, at the time of this study, held the position of faculty instructor and special education program coordinator at an institution of higher education. This permitted me to work directly, as an instructor and advisor, with many of the teachers who participated in this study though

when I conducted the initial interviews and observations, they were not active. As such, the study was professionally and personally relevant at several levels. Furthermore, my interest in the outcome of this research was meaningful because I knew firsthand the difficulties these educators were enduring or would encounter in the classroom through the course of their teaching careers. In my capacity as instructor, I desired to improve the preparation and support provided for these teachers who I observed were, in my opinion, woefully under-supported and under-prepared. Having experienced the difficulties of serving students with special needs as well as of hiring and retaining high quality SETs, I desired to better understand, both theoretically and practically, the phenomenon under study. I have included this disclosure to reveal my subjective interest and investments. Through frequent reflexive practices and triangulation of the data and findings through various methods discussed above (i.e. member checking, peer debriefing, theory), I strove to represent the perceptions of the participants rather than my own. Moreover, it was my opinion that as I was the “research instrument” (Patton, 2002), my background and personal experiences enhanced rather than diminished my attentiveness to the participants’ perceptions and improved the depth and meaningfulness of analysis. This is consistent with Guba and Lincoln’s (1982) articulation of the qualitative researcher, or naturalist’s, preference for

...humans-as-instruments for reasons such as their greater insightfulness, their flexibility, their responsiveness, the holistic emphasis they can provide, their ability to utilize tacit knowledge, and their ability to process and ascribe meaning to data simultaneously with their acquisition. (p. 245)

Summary

Through the entirety of the process detailed above, I sought to achieve and/or maintain the criteria set forth by Tracy (2010) as essential to excellent qualitative research: a worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and coherence. At the time of this study, the phenomenon of interest had not been examined either in the context described or under similar conditions—characterized by specific systemic and programmatic features. Moreover, a better understanding of the development of novice, alternatively certified special education teachers could be useful at various levels and for numerable stakeholders (local and state education agencies, institutions of higher education, alternative certification program providers). The rigorous methods described above were employed in an authentic and credible manner to capture the essence of the phenomenon under study. Representing the phenomenon accurately and coherently may resonate with those in education who are interested in improving policy and practice.

As a researcher, I ethically executed my duties and responsibilities through maintaining the fidelity of the process, protecting confidentiality, and through a faithful hearing of the participants, treatment of their words, and sharing of their stories. Through frequent and ongoing interactions with experienced researchers and experts in the field, continuous access to relevant research and methodological resources, and regular self-reflection, I carefully monitored and maintained consistency and balance of practice and perspective.

CHAPTER IV

INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDIES

I present each case, conceptualized as its own bounded entity and unit of analysis, individually and utilize “thick description” to convey a sense of the participants’ experience of the phenomenon of interest: the preparation and development of novice, alternatively certified special education teachers in Oklahoma (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1998). Individual analysis of the cases as bounded entities provided insight into participant perspectives and highlighted aspects of capacity and commitment. Participants were pursuing certification by one of the two alternative routes presented in Chapter 3: the Non-Traditional Special Education (boot camp) route in which seven participants were active; or the Career Development Program for Paraprofessionals (para-to-teacher) route in which two participants were active. As shown in Table 4.1, at the time of the study, participants were at varying stages in the certification process. At the conclusion of the study, only Diane had completed all program requirements and was thereby eligible to obtain a standard certificate. Caroline had discontinued her program for reasons that I explain in a subsequent section. Vivian, Marie, and Tera were in their third year of teaching after which they would no longer be eligible to receive a provisional certificate. Vivian and Tera both required additional coursework. Marie had attempted but not yet passed the OGET.

Table 4.1
Certification Status

Certification Process								
Participants	Program	Prior Exp.	OGET	OSAT	OPTE	Coursework	Yrs. SET	Cert.
Olivia	Non-Trad.	None	Attempted	Attempted	Passed	Continuing (15hrs)	2	Provisional
Nancy	Non-Trad.	None	Passed	Attempted		Continuing (16hrs)	1	Provisional
Claire	Non-Trad.	None	Passed	Attempted		Continuing (14hrs)	1	Provisional
Caroline	Non-Trad.	1yr		Passed		Discontinued (17hrs)	2.5	Provisional
Marie	Non-Trad.	5yrs	Attempted	Passed	Passed	Complete (18hrs)	3	Provisional
Tera	Non-Trad.	5yrs	Passed	Passed	Passed	Continuing (15hrs)	3	Provisional
Stanley	Non-Trad.	15yrs +				Continuing (8hrs)	1	Provisional
Diane	Para-Teacher	3yrs	Passed	Passed	Passed	Complete (12hrs)	3	Standard
Vivian	Para-Teacher	6yrs	Passed	Passed	Passed	Continuing (6hrs)	3	Provisional

As noted in the preceding chapter, various data sources contributed to the development of the individual case-records. The following representations are the product of in-depth analysis of each case-record. They are ordered sequentially by the number of years of teaching experience each participant had prior to becoming a special education teacher—from least to most experienced. Further, they are grouped by program: the boot camp participants preceding the para-to-teacher. Table 4.2 provides this information in conjunction with information regarding the participants' years of experience working, in an official capacity, with individuals with special needs and the participants' educational attainments.

Table 4.2
Comparison of Teaching Experience, Work Experience with Individuals with Disabilities, and Educational Attainments

	Olivia	Nancy	Claire	Caroline	Marie	Tera	Stanley	Diane	Vivian
Teaching Experience	0	0	0	1	5	5	15+	3	6
Work Experience	0	3	7	11	5	5	0	3	5
Educational Attainments	B.S.	B.S. M.S.	B.S.	B.S. M.A., M. S.	B.S.	B.S.	B.S., M.A. M.Div	B.S.	B.S.

I introduce the following cases in depth and detail and give particular attention to distinguishing features (Stake, 1998; Patton, 2002). The overarching goal is to explore

how each case informs our understanding of the phenomenon of interest—NACSETs’ perceptions of their development as professionals.

Olivia

It is okay to mess up and learn from your mistakes...It was crazy! I felt like I wasn’t prepared, and I didn’t know what to do—at all. I didn’t know how to teach—what style to teach or what to teach. It was just, ‘This is what you’re teaching.’ It was really hard.

Olivia was in her late twenties at the time of the study and reflected that her calming temperament assisted her in serving her students: “People tell me that I have a lot of patience and understanding for the kids.” However, she also intimated that she was introspective and reserved with her colleagues. She commented that she preferred to be alone in order to “regroup and focus”—especially at work. Prior to entering the teaching profession, she had experience in social services. Of the experience and her subsequent decision to enter education she remarked, “I know I like working with kids, and I wanted to get away from the mental health side, where I started, because it is a burnout working with that.” She spoke with a former instructor who advised her to consider teaching where “...I would still be working with kids and I can use my knowledge from my work experience...working with kids and teaching them.”

Olivia’s first position was as a middle school, language arts, special education “lab teacher.” That was a difficult year for Olivia. She admitted her knowledge of language arts was limited and consequently had contributed to her difficulty in passing the certification exams. However, the paraprofessional assigned to Olivia’s classroom was experienced and familiar with the content and procedures. Therefore, Olivia’s assistant guided and assisted her through the first year:

She told me what she did, the reading material, everything. She basically helped me through that year. If it wasn't for her, then I would have been really lost and, probably, wouldn't want to come back. If it wasn't for her...she helped me through a lot.

After her first year, Olivia voluntarily moved to a high school setting where she was primarily responsible for teaching students with learning disabilities in math. She considered herself an “expert” in the content even though she continued to struggle with “how to teach” math. Further, her difficulties with basic classroom management continued. Olivia reflected, “I start off good, but I need to work on the ending part of the semester.” She continued:

For the classroom management, we have the rules of the classroom. If they follow it they're good, but I think we all become relaxed. You can kinda say my class is kinda crazy—the third nine weeks and the fourth nine weeks. I need to figure out how to transfer the first two nine weeks back into the third and fourth nine weeks—because it has been that way for both my years. The beginning is really smooth and good, but then the last is not so great.

In her third year, Olivia was moved to the position of math co-teacher, which entailed partnering with certified math teachers in general education classrooms.

I observed Olivia in her classroom during her second year teaching. The room was sparse. The grey walls were mostly bare with occasional clusters of motivational posters or math-related content. However, the décor was not organized—as if only perfunctorily considered. Students entered the classroom with familiarity and ease but did not appear aware of Olivia or acknowledge her presence in the classroom. They positioned themselves in groups around the classroom. Seats were not assigned nor were there clear expectations about behavior. There was no clear beginning to the lesson but rather a sudden introduction and halting progression through the content. Olivia appeared to have mastery of the specific content she was teaching. However, she taught

primarily to one cluster of attentive students. Even these students discussed texts and social media posts during the lesson, and Olivia did not correct or redirect their attention to the content. Several students, not in the main cluster, were loud, openly disruptive, and using profane language. Olivia made no effort to curtail the behavior or to redirect. Eventually, the students quieted themselves. There did appear to be some established classroom routines for when Olivia completed her instruction, as the students proceeded to their assignment without explicit directions to do so. Further, Olivia provided direct instruction to several individuals who required individualized attention and modified their assignments.

Olivia was comfortable with the content, yet her basic pedagogical skills were lacking and demonstrate novice struggles, such as lesson construction and delivery. She acknowledged this and described actively striving to improve herself in this area. She identified preparation as a critical area in which she needed to improve rather than teaching “on the fly.” Normally, her practice was as follows: “I know we are supposed to be in this area of the progression guide, so I’m just going to start teaching.”

When asked about the effectiveness of the boot camp in developing her skills as a teacher, Olivia initially commented, “I don’t think it helped at all.” She later revised her statement to acknowledge that the boot camp had informed her about the IEP process and educated her on specific elements related to special education law and practices. However, with regard to preparing her to teach, she adamantly responded negatively. Her continuing education classes provided some support and applicable knowledge about specific teaching elements such as lesson plan development, yet these, too, she perceived as insufficient. Until becoming a co-teacher at the beginning of her third year, she had

never taught with another teacher or extensively observed other teachers in practice.

While she commented that she preferred to teach independently in her own classroom, she acknowledged that as a co-teacher she was learning how to improve her teaching—specifically, how to teach “bell to bell”; how to maintain order and engagement; and how to relate professionally and personally with students and other professionals.

When reflecting on her early experience as a teacher, Olivia commented, “It was crazy! I felt like I wasn’t prepared, and I didn’t know what to do—at all. I didn’t know how to teach—what style to teach or what to teach. It was just, ‘This is what you’re teaching.’ It was really hard.” Olivia expressed a preference and predisposition to work independently and remain intentionally isolated from her peers. Therefore, the majority of her development occurred through her own efforts. “I basically had to teach myself.” However, she also remarked that various teachers counseled her on how to manage the personal aspects of teaching (i.e. coping with the emotional stress) as well as specific professional issues. Generally, she sought specific information from specific individuals whenever a need presented itself. In her first position, the paraprofessional in the classroom acted as a mentor, and she received specific problem-oriented support from her assigned mentor. She regretted that she did not have a mentor in her second year. Nonetheless, she appraised her progress positively. When asked if she had attained a level of proficiency as a professional that she was satisfied with, she responded, “I would say not quite. I’m almost there on that.” She expressed a desire to continue to learn so that she could better teach her students: “I am a teacher who is willing to learn anything that will help me be successful in the classroom and successful with my kids.”

For Olivia's first two years teaching, she expressed that she was not comfortable actively seeking assistance from her peers. However, Olivia claimed in a follow-up interview that she was opening up and asking questions of others in a more forthright manner. When asked what brought about the change, she replied that during a social function with her colleagues, the new, incoming special education director had communicated to Olivia that she, too, was new and would be learning with her. Further, she recognized herself as a member of a group of teachers—all striving together to achieve similar ends. This critical incident modified Olivia's perspective and bound her relationally to the group. Her acknowledgement of this change in her practice signified an increasing capacity to collaborate. She confirmed that in her third year she actively sought information and regularly conferred with her colleagues.

Olivia perceived her training to be deficient in comparison to her traditionally prepared colleagues. For example, in response to a question about her difficulty passing the certification exams, she qualified:

I'm probably making an excuse, but I keep saying, 'This is not my major. I didn't major in this.' So, the questions that they're asking, on some of them, how does it pertain to teaching or what other material do I need? Do I actually need a class that is going to teach me about this stuff because the question always comes up, 'How am I supposed to answer the essay questions? How do they want me to answer the essay questions? Is the approach wrong in what I am doing? Do I need more information about that?' I think that's one thing that is left out in it. Because, if you have a different degree and then go straight into education, it's just really hard—trying to think of the education setting. 'How are we to know what the educational setting is if you didn't take classes over it?' So, that's my struggle.

Olivia's insightful comments indicated that she perceived herself as unprepared based on the preparatory route by which she had entered the field.

Olivia struggled to pass the certification exams. She attempted the OGET three times and the Mild/Moderate OSAT two times unsuccessfully. She had, however, passed the OPTE and was taking intentional steps to prepare to retake both the OGET and OSAT. Her determination to prepare well and pass these exams demonstrated Olivia's commitment. She wanted to help children and viewed teaching as her opportunity to do so despite her difficulties with the process. "I just know one of my main goals is just helping kids—no matter what age they are. So, me not wanting to do that or help kids—I can't picture that. I think I would want to do this: to help kids and to teach them new ways. I would think I will stay with it."

Nancy

The more I am in it, the more time I spend with the students, the more I love it and think, 'How could anybody not love this?' I know it's hard, but just seeing the kids smile—because you are there for them; or you're helping them learn something that someone said they would never learn. [It] makes all the struggle worth it.

Nancy was in her late twenties at the time of the study. She considered herself an avid learner and successful student. Though she regarded herself as non-confrontational and reserved in some respects, she had become assertive in advocating for students with special needs. "I'm very passionate about seeing children succeed [and] making sure that they are given the opportunities that they should be given." In short, "I'm stubborn, and I'm caring." She reflected that this impulse to act on behalf of those in need and to "help" first drew her to counseling. After practicing school-based counseling for three years and experiencing "burnout" due to the burden of carrying "everyone's problems," she decided to pursue special education where she could "help and just love." Other factors contributed to Nancy's interest in special education including her interactions with a

cousin on the autism spectrum and her admiration for her mom, a long-time psychiatric nurse.

Nancy reported that her prior experience as a counselor provided her with an understanding of problem behaviors and their antecedents or function. Additionally, she felt “able to understand the diagnosis” and situate certain behaviors within a clinical paradigm. She considered her “seven years of studying psychology and behavior and development” as beneficial preparation for special education. From her perspective, they were complimentary fields.

Nancy proceeded in the Non-Traditional route to certification after she was hired as a long-term substitute in a self-contained, second through fifth grade, elementary classroom. Simultaneously, she undertook the boot camp and began graduate-level coursework in special education at a local university. Thus, she was simultaneously teaching, participating in the boot camp, and taking graduate courses. “I was doing three full-time jobs. So, I didn’t ever really feel like I had a day off. It kinda wore me down—but not enough to make me want to give up.” From her perspective, these experiences were complementary: “We would learn how to write IEPs or learn different things that needed to go into an IEP and then I would go and, ‘Oh, I just learned about this. I know why this needs to be done this way.’” Concerning the ordering of her preparation, she summarized,

Attending boot camp and working at the same time, I think, worked together because I was learning as I was working—so I was kind of simultaneously doing them. Adding grad school into it was a little much, but I needed to do it.

Nancy’s positive outlook and general acclamation of both her boot camp training and her continuing education contrasted distinctly with her experience as a teacher. “It

was very overwhelming. I came from whole different world. So, learning the ins and outs of education versus counseling...there were some similarities, but there were also a lot of differences that I had to learn.” Nancy’s level of preparation evidently was insufficient to address the needs of the classroom where she was employed. When she assumed the position of teacher, she was at a loss as to how to go about the practice of teaching. She commented, “I can do elementary math and science and reading, but am I teaching them the right techniques to do it?—that they need to know?” She said the district assured her they would support her development: “They said, ‘Oh, we’ll teach you on the job. We’ll teach you as you go.’” In actuality, however, “It was more of a, ‘Here you go. Here is your classroom. Figure it out.’ Which made it really difficult. And they knew that I had no idea what I was doing.”

Nancy sought out assistance from both her assigned mentor and the special education director. Of the former, she stated simply, “She never helped me.” Of the latter, she stated that she was “really supportive” but largely unavailable due to her various roles and administrative responsibilities. Nancy’s lack of knowledge was not due to negligence or reticence. Rather, she lacked a cognitive scheme for further development—“I don’t know what I’m asking for.” Thus, the process was abortive. Nancy employed a variety of resources including various online resources, communicating with former boot camp colleagues and current graduate and professional colleagues, and accessing an assortment of curricular resources. However, she did not recognize significant development until she was repositioned into a constructive and supportive environment.

A fully certified teacher replaced Nancy just prior to Thanksgiving in her first semester of employment. She subsequently transitioned to work as a paraprofessional in an early childhood special education classroom, which she eventually came to view as a constructive move. However, initially, she stated that the adjustment was difficult and emotional because she was thoroughly invested in her work despite her struggles as a teacher. Nonetheless, Nancy reflected that her removal from the classroom gave her opportunity to develop her skillfulness as a teacher—increasing her capacity in several critical areas. She attributed her subsequent progress to the lead teacher’s willingness to include her in classroom activities and her growing insight into which questions to ask or information to seek. Nancy noted that her time as a paraprofessional was more beneficial because her experience as a teacher increased her awareness of which skills and knowledge to develop. The reversing of the typical order of the progression is insightful. While Nancy struggled initially with what she perceived to be an unjust removal, she later recognized the benefit of working with and learning from an accomplished teacher—equating it to an internship.

I feel like this time has been kind of a student-teaching kinda time. When you are going through your bachelor’s, you get that time to student teach. And my teacher that I am with now, she’s let me teach lessons, she lets me give assessments, she asks my opinion on what would be good for the kids to do or what I would do. And I really feel like I have learned so much from her that I could step into a classroom now—and be comfortable and know what I was doing. I really, really am thankful for the change that happened—that I wasn’t thankful for when it happened. But now, I’m like, ‘This was a blessing.’

Nancy expressed her intention to pursue employment as a teacher once she completed her program entirely.

Claire

This year has definitely been a learning experience. I am willing to try anything. Whatever they throw at me, I'm willing to try it. I may not be any good at it, but I'll try.

Claire was in her mid-twenties at the time of the study. She described herself in the following way, “As a teacher, I try to smile a lot and to be open with conversation to get to know the students and to allow the students to get to know me.” Claire has a younger brother with autism; she recognized her experience with him was formative and prefigured her entrance into the field of special education. She noted that he taught her “patience and understanding.” Additionally, she stated, “I think he’s definitely taught me not to judge people, and not to be embarrassed. To me, it’s almost a gift.” Claire’s previous work experience included seven years of employment with a non-profit organization where she and her mom used to volunteer. It provided job and recreational support as well as living assistance for adults with special needs. Her primary duties were as a job coach. Additionally, she was practiced in what she calls “community paperwork”—that is, the paperwork required to appropriate funding and services related to each individual’s program. Though she considered herself proficient, the knowledge had not resulted in an easy transition to understanding and maintaining special education paperwork. Due to feeling “burnt out” in her former position, Claire chose to enter the teaching profession. Additionally, she desired to, “use my degree.” Claire was assigned as a high school co-teacher. In this capacity, she worked with math and science teachers with varied levels of interaction and perceived success.

Of her formal training, which included the boot camp, her required continuing education coursework, and the activities provided through the district where she was

employed, she remarked, "...there's so much information!" Concerning the district level training, she was included in the typical new teacher training, which, for someone without a background in education, felt "overwhelming." She incorporated very little of the information that was provided in that orientation. Of primary importance to her were the relationships she formed with her fellow teachers. One, in particular, became her mentor and friend. She regretted that the boot camp did not provide more instruction on "how to teach" and basic classroom organization and management techniques. She considered her continuing education as moderately though indistinctly helpful. In particular, she expressed that it was useful to discuss with her peers problems and struggles encountered in her practice, thus she considered the discussion opportunities, not the content, as most important. Claire commented that the temporary learning communities that formed in her classes provided essential support. Consistently, she expressed a desire to have more "hands on" training or supervised teaching experiences where she could develop her teaching proficiency.

Claire remarked, "I was terrified—nauseous and scared," when reflecting on her initiation to the classroom. She felt unprepared despite intentional efforts to develop her skillfulness prior to entering the classroom through volunteer work. "I was not prepared—at all." However, once she gained actual classroom experience, she recognized improvement. "With the help of the other teachers, it's been a lot easier. But it would be a lot easier if I was knowledgeable specifically about the detailed topics that I'm supposed to be teaching." This was a regular refrain manifesting consistently in her case-record. Claire acknowledge that co-teaching provided her with opportunities to develop her skills through observing and assisting qualified content-area teachers in their

work. However, because Claire was not trained in the specific areas in which she was asked to assist, she often felt uninformed and on the same level as her students which caused her stress. She approached this difficulty boldly, “I’ll jump in and try to help students as I can.” Over time, she perceived improvement in this area and had developed specific strategies to overcome her lack of knowledge, which included requesting notes, studying with the students, and insisting that she have a key on hand to better assist students. Claire was optimistic about her progress, “Give me another year or two and I’ll be perfectly fine!”

Claire reflected that her development was significantly enhanced by a fellow teacher who was, at the time, also a novice teacher. This young teacher had completed her training in a traditional preparation program and was, according to Claire, impressively active and competent as a new teacher. Claire recalled their meeting at the initial training for new employees, “I’m going to have to be your mentor for this, but I’m not actually your mentor. I hope that’s okay with you. This unofficial mentor intentionally assisted Claire with all aspects of her development by allowing Claire to shadow her in IEP meetings, helping Claire develop her first IEP, and sitting with Claire in her first meeting. Claire reported that this considerably reduced her anxiety.

She was very good about teaching me every little detail—even though I was like a deer in the headlights learning so much information. But, she would give me her examples of how she would do things; she would sit with me throughout the whole process of the EdPlan and everything; she would explain everything no matter how many times I asked her to re-explain it in like a caring, ‘I know your new...’ type of personality.

Claire’s resourcefulness, her deliberateness in seeking out resources and actively engaging in her own improvement, her candor about her own needs and perceived areas of deficiency signify a deliberate intention to develop as a teacher. Her expressions

throughout the case-record indicated a passion for her work and compassion for her students: “Be passionate—even if it’s something that you don’t care so much about...pretend you do, and the students are more likely to seem to care more as well.” Incidentally, she applied these two descriptors, passionate and compassionate, to her mentor-figure. When asked directly if she considered herself equal to her mentor in this regard, she remarked, “Well, not quite. She’s hard to beat, man! (laughing)—‘cause she’s so good. But I have the desire to be there one day. I feel like I’m trying.”

This implicit acknowledgement of the importance of experience emerged throughout the case. For instance, Claire commented, “Next year, since I will be more familiar with the special ed paperwork, I think that I will be able to broaden my workload.” Though Claire indicated she felt overwhelmed initially by the volume and intensity of the work, her lack of expertise and knowledge about the particulars of that work (e.g. content knowledge, how to teach, paperwork, etc.), and the environment in which she asked to work (e.g. high school, co-teaching), certain environmental and personal factors combined in such a way that when asked at the conclusion of her first year how she felt, she remarked, “It went well. It was a terrifying learning experience—that I achieved. I got comfortable...once I started doing it, [and] it was not as terrifying as I thought it was going to be.” Again, her unofficial mentor’s intentional and responsive support contributed to Claire’s increasing capacity as a teacher and her commitment to the field. As such, Claire expressed her intention to continue in the profession with the aspiration of someday teaching in a self-contained, severe-profound classroom.

Caroline

My experience with teaching really derailed my life in a lot of ways.

Caroline is a “critical case” (Patton, 2002) due to the singularity of her experiences and the outcome—that is, she withdrew from her preparation program and teaching. Caroline was a career-changer in her mid-fifties. Due to having recently relocated, her social network of support was limited. Caroline’s prior work experience included working as a social worker serving adults in nursing homes, nursing facilities, and group homes. In that role, she served individuals with developmental disabilities. Further, she had advanced in her career to become a “trainer of trainers.” Caroline indicated that she enjoyed teaching, having worked for a year as an adjunct at a local university, and began exploring options to enter the profession. Consequently, Caroline completed the boot camp training while living and working outside of Oklahoma.

After completing the boot camp, Caroline immediately assumed a long-term substitute position in a public elementary school located in a mid-sized city, or “urban cluster,” within Oklahoma. She worked in that capacity for the last six weeks of the academic school year, serving in a self-contained classroom with fourth and fifth grade students who were intellectually disabled with one or more having a concomitant diagnosis of emotional disturbance. Of those six weeks, she spent the first few observing paraprofessionals as they worked with the students. Only after she was familiar with the students and program did she engage as their teacher.

Over the next three years, she held three different positions. The first position was as a middle school (sixth through eighth grade) special education teacher, where her primary responsibilities were teaching writing in a special education lab setting. She had

six to twelve students hourly and managed a caseload of approximately 20 students. Her second position was in a rural school in Western Oklahoma where she was hired as the special education director for the district and provided only minimal direct instruction to students with special needs. Primarily, she managed a caseload of approximately 20 students and taught seventh and eighth grade general education English. At the end of that academic school year, the school closed. Therefore, Caroline returned to the city where she taught previously and took her third position as a resource teacher in an elementary school. There, she was responsible for approximately 20, first through fifth grade students with varied disabilities and educational needs. She continued in this position for one semester before she voluntarily resigned. In all, Caroline taught for two and a half years before returning to social work. Changing schools each consecutive year of employment created a disjointed experience. She later reflected, “Had I stayed in the first position and been there for three successive years, I would have been fine.”

Concerning her regard for herself as a learner, Caroline reflected,

I think I am a great learner. I am very good at learning. I’m not convinced that I am great at putting it into practice once I’ve learned it, but—I think I am very idea oriented. I love learning. But—thinking about this experience makes me not sure that I am always able to use what I learn.

A recurring sentiment in the case was that Caroline felt frustrated and defeated when she could not “achieve” highest marks or perform at her best. “I was used to mastery—to being the professional in the room.” Having achieved a position of authority in her work as a social worker, she was accustomed to having others seek information and guidance from her. She was comfortable in that position and felt competent. Caroline viewed her knowledge of professionalism as a strength. However, despite the similarities between social work and special education, she was not convinced they mattered in practice.

Caroline remarked of her development that the first year she survived on bravado—"I can do this!" The second year she persevered by sheer will-power—"Dammit! I'm going to do it. I don't care what happens." The third and final year she realized defeat—"I can't do it." These remarks describe the track of her emotional journey and outline the contours of her experience as a teacher. Although Caroline attempted to develop her skills through interactions with other educators, she acknowledged that lack of time devoted to the task impeded those efforts. Thus, she perceived that the lack of these two structural supports, time and mentoring, affected her pedagogical development.

There were teachers who, at the end of the day, would spend time talking to me about teaching, but they did not have time during the day to mentor me—to teach me how to teach. There were very good teachers. And I could sit and watch them and say, 'Wow, that is so cool.' But I was years away from ever having that kind of confidence in the classroom.

Caroline attributed her difficulties in part to managing competing demands and trying to learn different, though related, domains of knowledge: "It was a bit overwhelming because I was trying to learn how to teach and how to manage the IEP load and how to manage behaviors." Of her eventual removal from the classroom, she remarked, "I just think it was too many competing demands for me to manage [and] some resistance on the part of teachers. I think I was really probably not able to access resources other than those in building which was more experienced teachers. But they could only help me so far." Caroline struggled regularly to manage her coursework, the varied demands of the work itself, and her personal affairs. "There were many days that I was simply overwhelmed with school, practicum, the transition to a new position, and

other life commitments.” She articulated on a number of occasions her intention to take purposeful steps to simplify her life in order to effectively manage these concerns.

Caroline admitted that she infrequently sought out resources to assist her either with instruction or other professional matters associated with her development.

Regarding instruction, she remarked, “I usually try to step back and find some new approach. I would usually go online and look for other ways to try to teach a thing.”

Primarily, however, she accessed experienced teachers in her workplace or affiliated with her graduate coursework as resources —and these on a very limited basis. Of this, she explained, “I honestly have to say that I was so overwhelmed that I did not access any resources that might have been available. I really didn’t look very far.” There was minimal evidence to suggest that Caroline was able to connect meaningfully with a mentor or with her colleagues either professionally or personally. Her primary human resources were her paras and fellow teachers, with whom she maintained only a tenuous relationship.

In all, the course of Caroline’s development as a teacher was shadowed by difficulties. She sought to improve herself as a professional and understood conceptually what that entailed and required of her; however, she reported being ineffectual in her application of that knowledge. Her overriding desire was for a “sense of mastery”—developed capacity:

...everything they told me, every reason that teachers were giving me for reasons to do something different, made sense to me. But it got to where I just didn’t know how to do it. You know, it all made sense. I just didn’t know what I was doing. And that was frustrating because one of the things I discovered about myself is that I do need to have some sense of mastery about what I am doing, and I got to the point where I had, not even a sense of mastery, but a sense of being incompetent. And that was very difficult.

Incompetent in what way?

Professional incompetence—in that I just could not provide the services that were necessary under the circumstances that I was asked to provide them.

She perceived the school climate where she last taught to be highly competitive and performance driven.

The school that I was at was the only ‘A’ school in [this city]. It’s a *Blue Ribbon* school and a *Blue Ribbon* principal. She just did not have time and resources to [develop me]. She couldn’t lose a year of development with her kids.

These expectations were not conducive to Caroline’s development. “There were very talented teachers in that building. It just wasn’t a situation where I could learn what I needed to learn.” Further, Caroline described resistance from a number of general education teachers when she sought to fulfill the requirements of her students’ IEPs. Primarily, this resistance was from teachers whose grade levels participated in state-mandated testing.

Caroline’s heightened sense of professional responsibility, her knowledge that the IEP of any student was a legally binding document that had to be followed explicitly or modified to reflect actual practice, and her sense of inadequacy with respect to her knowledge of specific grade-level content all appeared to contribute to her discontent and friction in the work environment. She also explicitly described a lack of support and ability to translate knowledge to “practice.” She observed that eventually, due to the intransigence of several grade-level teachers regarding the appropriate implementation of individualized instruction and supports, “It just became an impossible situation.”

This “critical case” (Patton, 2002) provided insightful perceptions of one who chose to leave the profession. Caroline’s expressions revealed a pervasive sense of incompetence, of inadequacy, and of unpreparedness. Her perceived inability to regulate

and adapt to her new manifold duties was a marked difference to her experience as an efficient, effective, and well-respected professional in the social services field. The case-record indicated that she felt unprepared for the rigors of teaching, for working with students with complex emotional and intellectual needs, or for managing the additional responsibilities entailed in special education. Of her first full-time position she relates, “I was teaching six periods a day. It was overwhelming because I was trying to learn how to teach and how to manage the IEP load and how to manage behaviors.” She intimated that she never achieved a sense of competence as a teacher. In fact, she identified one instance during her last semester, which was a turning point (critical incident) in terms of her belief in herself:

I sent down a grade [to the general education teacher] of 100% for what she (the student) was capable of doing. The teacher lowered the grade to 70%. What is the point [of SPED]?!? That is what made me feel incompetent—like I did not know what I was doing.

These comments and this case evince a perceived lack of capacity to effectively execute the responsibilities of a special educator with a noticeable impact on job-satisfaction.

When asked if she felt like she made progress in the field, Caroline replied, “No—but I probably learned more than I realize.” She avowed that she expected to attain a level of competence and to function proficiently as a special educator. However, she did not make progress as anticipated. She commented frankly, “The system is not good at supporting new learners—without a background in education.”

Marie

I feel overwhelmed at times when I have so much to do and don't have enough time in the day to complete everything I have planned. I honestly am not able to think at this time. I need to learn to say 'no' to others when they ask me to do something. Being a new teacher and under the three year trial at my current

employer, I have a very hard time saying 'no.' I feel this looks bad on me. I love my job. I don't feel like it is a job. I look forward to being at the school.

Marie was in her early forties at the time of the study. She attested that her bachelor's degree in social sciences equipped her to understand the social and cultural underpinnings affecting the manifestation of certain behaviors and how to intervene appropriately in a general sense. Former work experience included employment as an assistant at a local childcare center and as a special education paraprofessional in an elementary school for five years. Marie began her teaching career in an elementary school as a third-grade special education teacher in a self-contained classroom. Her second and third years of teaching were as a second through fifth grade resource teacher. In the latter position, she was the only special education teacher assigned to that school; therefore, she managed and coordinated the majority of special education services.

Marie had a close family member who received special services as a K-12 student and successfully attended college. Marie identified this as one of the motivating factors that contributed to her decision to pursue special education versus other career routes. She rationalized, "I know that these students that I work with, if they get the help that they need now, they could be successful just like she was." Marie's commitment to the field and her unyielding determination to do her work well, even at the cost of tremendous self-sacrifice, was prompted by the simple belief, "The kids come first."

Marie was direct in her statements. She often spoke only of the present with minimal connection to past experiences or future plans. Yet indicators of reflective practice were evident in her adaptability and proficiency as a teacher as recorded in the case-record. She was highly routinized in her practices though willing to change to meet the needs of the students. She identified calmness as her defining characteristic, which

she attributed to her upbringing and training: “I grew up with parents being calm. So, I think it is learned that way as well as [through] some of the training that I’ve had to stay calm in situations—especially, when they are having a crisis.” She remarked that other teachers often sought her out when encountering difficulties with their students. In such instances, she stated that she intervened in the following way, “Being calm. Not demanding. Letting them express what they need to express and not constantly saying, ‘What’s wrong? What’s wrong? What’s wrong?’”

Marie was unique too in that she had a clear sensitivity to the needs of the educational community of which she was a part, yet she managed to maintain her individuality and autonomy in practice. This was noticeable in how she approached challenges in the workplace. For example, she described once boldly asking a question at a meeting with OKSDE representatives. Reflecting on this experience, she remarked, “I was a little wary, but I felt like I needed to—because, I am sure that if I am the one who had the question, then the person next to me did too.” Thus, she believed her question served to reframe an individual professional problem as a community concern. This inclination to cognitively situate herself within the larger professional community was revelatory because it demonstrated implicit professional association and identification.

As noted above, perhaps most distinctive of this case was Marie’s tireless attention to her work. Her diligence in preparing and her drive to attend to all responsibilities required an immense expenditure of personal resources (i.e. time and energy). Furthermore, she described having sustained this level of engagement for three years continuously. Her attention to her preparations was deliberate: “Well, if I don’t, then I am going to be stressed about it not being done.” She remarked that continuous

attentiveness to her duties was necessary to maintain a caseload of nearly forty students in addition to the daily responsibility of teaching all day. When asked if this level of activity was sustainable, she commented, “Yes, for now.” However, she also observed, “The last few nights, the janitor, who leaves at 8:30, is usually gone by the time I leave.” She regarded this level of commitment as necessary to maintain and develop her capacity as a special educator.

Marie regarded her continuing education coursework and boot camp training as beneficial in both direct and indirect ways. From both, she learned specific skills related to special education and increased her pedagogical competence. Indirectly, she was temporarily supported by a learning community both emotionally and educationally. However, when asked directly how she learned to teach, she commented without hesitation, “By being a para. When you are a para, you step in wherever the teachers needs you.” She regarded this preparation as formative. Further, she recognized that her experience in an environment comparable to that in which she would eventually teach, combined with direct instruction on key areas of knowledge specific to the field, assisted in her transition.

Marie’s development and transition may have been aided by an incremental increase of her professional duties. Additionally, she expressed that her familiarity with her students, her colleagues, and the setting of her first position eased her transition.. Of her first year, she related, “I had a very good year. I had four students on my caseload that year. So, very minimal. [They put the third and fourth grade classes together in one room.] So, we kinda had a split class between two teachers. We just taught together.” This close collaboration with an experienced teacher was “very helpful.” Furthermore,

her success in this setting prompted her transfer to a setting where her workload was increased significantly and where she was the only special education teacher.

Even though Marie touted the benefits of her formal training, experience was of greatest benefit:

It is much easier now than what it was last year because I have done so many. The wording is easier; knowing where to put things is just natural now. Before, when I first began, I was stressed about—‘Am I putting this right? Am I stating this right—or the correct way?’ Now, it’s just...just do it.

With experience, she was willing to “play with it to figure it out.” These comments evinced a growth-centered perspective. They also gave insight to her development as a professional. When asked directly if she was able to countermand non-essential requests, where before she felt obliged to say “yes”, she answered affirmatively:

When any extra activity was asked of me, I would be willing to say, ‘Sure. Yes.’ This year, I have so much paperwork, I just have to say ‘no.’ I have to or I’m not going to be able to get my work done.

This evidence suggested that Marie understood her role and professional responsibilities well enough to recognize their limits.

Marie indicated that she felt supported throughout her transition. Though she was assigned a mentor formally, her partner teacher appeared to be the most influential. “It was just so much easier because I was already in the classroom with [her] and just to ask her questions.” Of the general educators that she worked with, she remarked,

They are very good to come and let me know if anything is different about their students: if they are having a bad day; if something is going on. They’ll email, call me, step in if they are not sure what is going on.

The reciprocal trust and regular interaction denoted a healthy level of relatedness sometimes not found between special educators and regular educators. Further, Marie felt supported by her building principal and district level special education

administration. Of the former, she remarked exuberantly, “My principal—she is fantastic! She was a special ed teacher before she became a principal.” Marie also spoke positively of the correspondence she had with the special service center. When she had a question, she would call the administrative secretary and state, “I have an issue and am not sure how to fix it.’ And she’s very good about finding an answer.” Further, when Marie made a mistake that required administrative intervention, she was assured, “It’s okay. We’ll work through it. It’s okay.” This level of contact with the administration both at the site and district level provided Marie with an integrated base of support.

Marie did not appear overtly self-reflective, yet it was evident that she perceived to have developed content and pedagogical competence as well as distinct professional characteristics. She expressed unhesitatingly her commitment to the profession and her intent to continue.

Tera

I chose to take on the role of being a teacher. I think there are probably teachers who would be okay with just getting by. But I really want to do good for these kids, and I really want to do the best that I can. I think my main goal is to be effective for them—to know the processes, to know what I need to know, to know the resources that I need for them to graduate from high school and be effective adults.

Tera was in her mid-thirties and married, with three adolescent children, at the time of the study. She considered herself the “leader of my house” and admitted that this shaped her perspective and practices as a teacher. Tera worked previously as a para-professional both in a severe-profound, self-contained setting as well as in a resource room. This experience shaped her as a teacher and prepared her in some ways to enter the profession with a certain level of proficiency. While she had not intended to become a special educator, circumstances developed and an opportunity to pursue a career as an

educator manifested. To this point, she remarked, “I never really had... hopes or dreams of becoming a teacher. But, I kind of just worked myself into it.” Now, of the profession, she stated, “I really enjoy it. I’m very comfortable with it—especially on the special ed. side.”

Tera was in her third year as a high school special education teacher in a rural district. During that time, she did not have a formal mentor. However, the special education director, who formerly held her position, was initially responsible for her paperwork and assisted her to develop individualized curricula, specific classroom practices, and schedules and was available to provide general support on a regular basis. Tera relied heavily upon her experience as a mom and her previous work experience as a para-professional when initially transitioning into the field. “I’m always correlating my kids to these kids.” Additionally, she indicated that she worked closely with the middle-school special education teacher whose classroom was located adjacent to her own. They supported each other personally and worked collaboratively to address specific student needs professionally.

Tera’s classroom was organized and comfortable with décor that added vibrancy and “style” to the room. It was also saturated, though not overwhelmingly, with content-related materials. It was an open-door classroom—welcoming and easy. “I do have lots of students who come through here. I always try to be open with all students and respectful.” Tera was highly relational in her practice. “One of my main concerns is really focusing upon getting to know my students, and it not just being about curriculum and classwork.” This was plainly visible in her classroom. With each transition of students in and out of her classroom, she greeted each by name and often asked about

specific personal concerns. The students responded to her inquiries familiarly and without apprehension. She apparently had established a safe, respectful, and nonjudgmental atmosphere in her classroom that promoted relatedness. This was further highlighted in her regret that other teachers did not take similar pains to know their students,

I feel like if some teachers really knew some of these kids and really got to know them and some of their stories, they would understand the struggles that they have and why they may not be as successful as some of the other kids in the class.

This statement indicates that she compared herself and her practice to her colleagues' and may signify the development of a distinct professional identity.

Tera was functioning both as a resource teacher and a classroom teacher. She had students with her every hour of the instructional day for individual academic or behavioral support. Additionally, she developed a functional life skills curriculum, from which many of her students benefitted. Tera admitted that she felt less capable in teaching specific content (e.g. algebra II or biology). Even so, she reflected that her competence in this area was developing. She was becoming more assertive in her advocacy for students and proficient in the identification of specific resources and strategies to assist in this area. Tera's proficiency developing and implementing IEPs for her students developed with experience and "...knowing my students." Of her increased expertise in all areas, she remarked, "Every year it gets better, and every year I feel more like a teacher. When [I was] first starting out, it was odd for kids to call me Mrs. —. It was really odd. But, I think every year, it gets better."

Even so, Tera did not regard herself as a teacher in her third year—at least, not in the customary or traditional sense. In fact, she was resistant to being categorized as such.

“I don’t feel like I am a normal, everyday special ed teacher.” I asked why she did not regard herself as “normal.” She responded, “Probably my personality, the way I dress, the way I act. I’m very open with lots of things.” She believed that this helped her to relate to her students in a more personal manner. Further, this did not diminish her authority in the classroom. When I observed her, it was evident that she could contain behaviors and maintain instructional control. This ability developed incrementally as she became more experienced in the classroom as well as with students’ deepening knowledge of her: “My kids know who I am.” The implication was that knowing who she is entailed implicit expectations. She explained:

That was a struggle at first—trying to figure out who I was as a teacher, what kind of teacher I wanted to be. And really just having those expectations for my kids where they understood, ‘Okay, this is what is expected of you.’ It was a struggle at first. It’s easier now.

Tera attributed her ability to find the balance between familiarity with her students and professional distance by relying on her experience as a mom. Her experience as a parent contributed in other ways as well. For instance, she felt she was better able to sympathize with and relate to the parents of her students as well as to the students when they are having difficulties with their parents: “I’m always correlating my kids to these kids and these are my kids—they are. I’ll say, ‘When N— does this and that...Being a mom...If you were my son, I would feel the same way.’” Being the “leader” of her house, ensuring that “everything gets done,” helped her manage the many duties and obligatory responsibilities of the work—as well as her time: “I think it helps being a mom and having about 30 activities going on a week. I am kind of a high stress person. I really work better that way.” Finally, being a mom increased Tera’s familial affection for her students. “I love all of my kids. I do.”

Developmentally most important to Tera was her experience as a para-professional and on-the-job as a teacher. “It throws you into the routine of it. There’s a lot to learn with everything—not just teaching but everything. It was easier for me to be able to use it, to work it every day then retain it because I had to do it every day.” She remarked that both the boot camp training and her continuing education coursework were less useful in a formative sense. She could not recall any significant information learned either from the boot camp or her graduate courses: “I wrote my first IEPs before I even went to class on them or went to boot camp. So, after having class and talking about behavior plans and IEPs, I was like, “Well, I’ve already done it.” Thus, experience, both prior to and on-the-job, emerged as a central theme in this case. Also evident, were the other structural supports (i.e. administrative and collegial support, continuity of placement, etc.), which had sustained her as she developed her capacity. Tera expressed satisfaction with her job and her intention to continue in the field for an indeterminate duration. However, she also indicated an interest in transitioning to adult services for individuals with disabilities. “I love working with people—making a difference. I want to help.” At the time, she felt she was “making a difference” in the lives of her students.

Stanley

Now that I’m teaching in special ed., contrary to what I had anticipated, it is actually a lot more difficult than I had anticipated. It is a lot more challenging to reach students with learning disabilities who cannot comprehend what I’ve said, and I have to plumb the depths of my knowledge and resources to get them to understand and think in different ways than they think they are able to. So, it is very challenging—and rewarding.

Stanley was in his mid-fifties at the time of this study with multiple degrees and diverse work experience. Stanley did not intend to become a special education teacher. In fact, he did not have any interest previously in teaching at the K-12 level. The move

was one of opportunity. Stanley's colleagues where he worked as a janitor encouraged him to enter the profession. Of this, Stanley recalled his supervisor saying, "You need to do this. You can do this. This is better than being just a janitor." Stanley based his choice to pursue special education upon realizing that, with his degrees, it was the easiest route to certification.

Even though he was only in his second year as a special educator, Stanley had extensive formal and informal experience as a teacher. "Teaching has been a fundamental part of my life. Even when I am not teaching, I'm always teaching. I have to learn to be quiet." He recognized that this experience assisted him in the practice of teaching. Stanley comments repeatedly demonstrated a highly reflective individual who was intentional in his actions with regard to improving his practice. Even so, he was impacted by the difficulties of the special education classroom. He recognized its challenges and understood that proficiency required both time and effort to develop. He reflected when asked if he felt effective, "No! Overall, yes. But I think I can improve on [classroom management]. I still haven't reached the point where I can control the way I want it to go, and I think a proficient teacher can do that with ease." When asked subsequently how he had attained that level of proficiency, he responded, "Experience."

Stanley had a high view of education. Of it, he reflected hopefully, "...education makes for a better world, a better human, a better soul. It can be misused for the worse. But the more we know, the better that we should be—if we can use what we know." He also had an integrated philosophy of education. A central theme guiding his philosophy was, "People always come before the subject." In his practice, he maintained a people-first perspective while also striving to elevate the value of education in his students'

estimation. Stanley's life experience, his profundity as a thinker, his diligence in his work, and his compassion for people have contributed to his transition into the role of special educator.

Stanley attested that his extensive language training helped him in the classroom as well as experience teaching diverse cultures. However, once in the classroom with the responsibility of teaching students with special needs, he reflected that his training insufficiently addressed particular aspects of the new context:

Even though I know how to teach in a specific context, this context is not the same. So, I still have to learn that. And in teaching, I might know basic math, the math is not difficult, but trying to get students who do not understand it to understand it, the actual transference of knowledge, that is the really hard discipline.

Stanley's adaptation and utilization of his knowledge of languages was unique. "I enjoy languages. So, I am more adept at being adaptable with language use." Adapting prior knowledge and previously developed skills to meet the particular needs of his students demonstrated both versatility and resourcefulness characteristic of expert teachers.

...teaching a subject...to students from both sides of the spectrum, means that one must be quite versatile in being able to speak the same language as people on either side. And, I think to do that takes a great skill. Whoever can do that, I admire as being a great educator.

When asked if he was such an educator, he deprecatingly replied, "I try to be. I don't know if I succeed. Sometimes people will tell me that I've made it, but I don't feel like I always do. To me, it's a constant process."

Attending the boot camp prepared him for "nitty gritty" of the paperwork. "I think I am pretty much on top of that." Additionally, his previous work as a farm manager and in children's homes also prepared him to cope with the volume of

paperwork. This was notable because as a first-year teacher, he managed over 30 students on his caseload and as a second-year teacher nearly 40. Due to this load, he indicated that he rarely took time to look for new teaching methods or strategies or to access other resources that might augment his practice. “The amount of work is so much. I know it is going to take me awhile to get everything in order so I don’t feel like I’m treading water.” He claimed that experience would improve his efficiency in this regard.

Stanley believed that his educational preparation, though not in special education, provided him with a base upon which to develop his skillfulness in special education. Further, his prior experience provided him with opportunities to develop his skills working with and leading people. When asked which was most helpful in preparing him to be a special educator—the boot camp, continuing education (graduate courses), or on-the-job training—he responded,

Wow. I think it depends on which facet of teaching. I could never have done the special ed part of what I am doing without the boot camp. I think my previous experience in college and teaching probably helped me the most in being a teacher—in presenting material. And being on the job has helped, probably, smooth my sense of being comfortable with what I am doing.

Stanley’s reflective nature and continuous pursuit of “truth,” shaped his approach to developing as a special educator. He recognized deficiencies in his knowledge and was intentional in rectifying obvious errors and improving his practice generally.

I don’t hold on to the questions that I have. If I get stuck with something, I have to go and ask about it—because I want to do it right. Sometimes, I think I’ve done it right and find out that I’ve inadvertently left something out, and then I’ll try and rectify it. But, generally, I try and deal with it right then.

This professional attitude and desire for excellence compelled him to reflect critically upon himself with regard to teaching specific content. He noted that his own early education and undergraduate training provided as sufficient base of knowledge.

However, how to teach even elementary concepts or choosing the best methods remained elusive.

Furthermore, he indicated that he was daunted and sometimes discouraged by his ineffectiveness in teaching students whose pervasive educational needs impeded observable progress.

Teaching and seeing how they just don't get it—many times—[is] very frustrating. You think, 'Yes! The concept has finally sunk in!' and then the next day, it's like they've never heard of it before. You think, 'Oh, my gosh!'

The challenge presented by his students' slow and intermittent progress as well as his own perception of ineptitude with respect to "how to teach" induced his return to a core personal belief: "That's not where the fulfillment can always be. Hopefully, they can grow in knowledge and be able to do that. But, I think, seeing them as people develop—I think that is what I enjoy most."

Though Stanley was not assigned a mentor officially, he was employed in a small rural school that embraced him as a member of their community, recognized his qualities, and sought actively to support him in his work and development. Stanley reflected his cognizance of the importance of this community in relation to his development and his continued ability to manage the demands placed daily upon him, "I have realized that it is difficult to become a master of everything as well as special education. Collaboration is key to being successful as a special educator." Repeatedly, throughout the case-record, Stanley reported regular and constructive interactions between himself and his colleagues. They assisted him instrumentally in the provision of curricular resources as well as guided him in the development of his classroom management skills, pedagogical knowledge, and his knowledge of special education related protocols and procedures.

With respect to the latter, he worked closely with a highly experienced speech pathologist whose office was positioned adjacent to his. This proximity allowed them to develop a positive professional relationship. He asserted that he could ask of her “anything and everything.” Further, she was supportive while, at the same time, gave him opportunities to act autonomously. This form of support worked in this case. It evinced a responsiveness to Stanley’s changing level of need over the course of the year as well as trust in his ability to make professional judgments independently. Despite all of these supportive factors, his extensive knowledge, his prior experience, his mature philosophy and corresponding reflectiveness, and the many and various, though informal, structural supports, Stanley struggled as a novice:

Well, because teaching in this format is so new to me, I’m consciously having to think about what I have to do. So, it’s that conscious effort for minute after minute, maybe hour after hour, and then just feeling drained at the end of it. And, after even an hour, this constant questioning from three or four different groups in the room, having to switch subjects and making that manual transition—so, everything is actively being processed. So, I seem to have very little automatic response. So, that’s why it’s so draining.

When asked what might lessen the regular strain and resulting exhaustion, he remarked summarily, again, “Experience.”

Stanley’s position presented both advantages and disadvantages. He was the sole elementary special education teacher. As such, he bore the responsibility singly of managing a large caseload, conducting intensive evaluative procedures to determine eligibility for special services, supervising the delivery of related services, and coordinating and implementing IEPs for each of his students (again, numbering from 30-40). However, he rarely was at maximum volume in his classroom (ten students) and had the added advantage of working with highly cooperative general education teachers who

taught inclusively thus minimizing his need to provide direct instruction. Therefore, Stanley recognized that his position, though perpetually challenging, was appropriately responsive to his developmental needs and assistive in increasing his capacity as a professional. He expressed satisfaction in the work and was able to adequately manage his stress through deliberate practices and responsive community support. Stanley stated that he intended to remain in the profession and remarked that through experience and intentional effort he expected to continue to increase his knowledge and effectiveness.

Diane

[The kids] are the reason I started in the first place. And they kept me strong. I had seen the bad, and I didn't want them getting that again. I wasn't going to let it happen. And I knew it would get easier—I mean, I knew it had to. I could look around and see not everyone was as stressed as I was. So, I knew it got better—and it did.

Diane was in her late thirties with a bachelor's degree in sociology which she felt prepared her to work closely with students and parents with diverse backgrounds and experiences. At the time of this study, she was completing her third year as a severe/profound high school special education teacher and had a caseload of twelve students but would see 20 to 25 students per day. Although her previous work experience included working as a pre-school teacher as well as a Public Assistance Specialist, Diane did not have any prior experience working with students or individuals with disabilities until becoming a special education paraprofessional, which she did for three years prior to teaching. She stated, "I just kind of jumped right in and fell in love." Diane supervised ten paraprofessionals who assisted her with providing individual care and educational support. Thus, in her classroom at any point in the day, she would have ten adults and ten to fifteen students working on various activities.

For three years prior to becoming a teacher, Diane worked as a paraprofessional in the classroom where she later was employed as the teacher. In that time, she worked with and observed three different special education teachers. This fact afforded her a unique vantage point by which to evaluate her own progression as a teacher. Of that experience and its influence she remarked,

I think that because I had been a para for three years and because I got to see the good and the not so good, I think I had a pretty strong idea of what I wanted my classroom to look like and what I wanted to be able to present and how I wanted to be able to do it.

Diane had adopted and operated daily from the perspective that teamwork was essential. As such, she facilitated cooperative rather than individualistic attitudes in her classroom. Diane reported that her experience as a paraprofessional contributed to her attitude respecting her interactions with and regard for her assistants, “I was in their shoes and know how much I cared and know how much I knew but wasn’t going to say—and I want them to say it.”

Despite Diane’s experience as a para-educator and facility with some aspects of her work, in other areas she felt unprepared.

Moving into the teaching position, I felt I was definitely not prepared. I knew classroom management because I had seen it and I knew what I should be teaching. I felt unprepared for the paperwork—and unprepared for the parent contact part...because as a para you don’t see all that. You know, you just see what is going on in the classroom; you don’t see meetings; you don’t see other stuff. I felt completely unprepared for that. It took a good year, year and a half before I felt comfortable going into a meeting or contacting a parent and feeling fully comfortable doing that. That was definitely the most difficult transition.

Her comments indicated that her resolve to learn and appropriation of incidental resources in her immediate environment provided the necessary support for her to develop her capacity in these areas.

Initially, Diane was cowed by the fact that she, a novice, was presumably expected to instruct parents on what was best for their children; however, the parents themselves eventually helped Diane to develop her capacity. “I felt I should know everything.” Notably, she was carrying the sole responsibility for the educational program and the corresponding paperwork herself. This was a burdensome load for which she felt the responsibility acutely. “I thought it was all on me, and I had to have it perfect and ready like I was presenting.”

In her third year as a teacher, however, Diane’s mindset changed. She recognized the parents as resources. Where she was bearing the responsibility individually before, she came to understand that it was actually the IEP team’s shared responsibility. These two evolutions in perspective significantly altered her appraisal of the profession.

So, my first two years were completely stressful because it was all paperwork—it was not the kids, it was not teaching, it was figuring out how to get comfortable in front of parents presenting what I thought was the best thing for them—because I felt like I was this outsider coming in. They’ve been with their kid for twenty years, and I’m coming in telling you what I’m going to do and what I think is the best thing. But my mindset changed: ‘This isn’t my job to tell you what their goals are. It is our job. Tell me what you think and we’ll figure it out.’ It took so much stress off that part of it.

This development occurred in her third year as a teacher and was of critical importance. As indicated in the case-record, she reflected that her pedagogical and content-related competence, as well as cultural competence were already moderately developed when she began as a teacher. Thus, attaining competence in this last area, in effect, completed her transition. She perceived herself as a capable and effective teacher—still learning but able to meet the demands of the work on a daily basis.

Diane accessed few resources outside of those immediately available to her: her colleagues and her continuing education classmates. The teacher in the adjoining

classroom, who Diane described as readily available to assist at any time, was her principle resource and served as an informal mentor. Diane would occasionally access online resources to assist in lesson development or to seek information on specific issues. However, she observed that she had insufficient time in the day to do that on a regular basis. While she felt supported by the building and district administration, they did not instrumentally impact her development. She regarded her supervisor as an authority to whom she had to prove her worth. Of this, she remarked, “Not having an education background—that was nerve-wracking. It shouldn’t be...but it was nerve-wracking. You don’t know what they are looking for. I never had an issue even, but that was nerve-wracking.” She regarded her continuing education as enjoyable but could not identify any specific ways in which it contributed to her practice or development.

Diane acknowledged that her familiarity with the work, the workplace, the students and their needs, and the extant hierarchical and interactional frameworks positively contributed to her transition. Her capacity as a special educator was moderately developed because of her familiarity with the system; therefore, she was able to devote her time and energy to overcoming the several obstacles she encountered and was supported by her community doing so. The necessity to act, to make professional judgments and decisions, provided Diane with opportunities to learn. To “figure out” or “figure it out,” phrasing which occurs 25 times in the case record, defined Diane’s professional disposition. Diane perceived problems were solvable; goals as achievable, and challenges manageable with hard work and collaboration. Diane’s job-satisfaction and developing capacity to manage stress in a responsive and supportive community

align with her expressed intent to continue as a special educator. “I believe that I have the best job on the planet!”

Vivian

I'm growing. I think, the more you do this, the more effective you get. You learn from other people.

Yes, it's very fulfilling—I think?...

Vivian was in her early forties at the time of the study and employed as a middle-school special educator in a rural school. For five years prior to becoming a teacher, Vivian was employed as a special education paraprofessional. Additionally, during the year just prior to her taking the position as a special educator, she worked as an emergency-certified language arts instructor. Once she attained a provisional certificate in special education, she continued employment in the district where she was formerly employed as a paraprofessional and language arts instructor.

Before entering education, Vivian was a hair stylist. Her decision to leave that line of work was abrupt, and her approach to education accidental. Of her leaving, she remarked tersely, “I did that for about eight years. And then got tired of the cattiness and walked.” Having intermittently worked as a substitute, she was approached by an administrator who requested that she apply as a paraprofessional. She somewhat hesitantly agreed and consequently began her journey in education. After attempting and failing to pass the certification exam twice, she was quite disheartened. An administrative assistant with whom she was working at the time supported her throughout,

‘You can do this. You were meant for this.’ Now that I’m here I’m like, ‘Maybe I’m not in the right profession.’ But I don’t mind doing something as long as it is

fun, and I am learning something. Once it gets boring, I'm out. This is never boring. It's different every day.

The latter remarks indicate Vivian's characteristic abruptness and lively personality as well as her appraisal of the profession.

Vivian described herself as personable and eager to build relationships. "I'm a bit of a hugger." She continued, "I'm laughy, and I'm jokey." Despite her ebullience, she struggled in her second year as a special educator with professional and personal concerns, which led to difficulty continuing her professional education coursework. Even so, Vivian was committed to the field—though with the same wistfulness that she demonstrated previously: "I've come too far. And like I said, as long as I am enjoying something, I'll keep doing it. If it gets to be too much, I'll find something else. I am pretty resourceful." This resourcefulness, undoubtedly, was an asset in the classroom—but also leaves open the possibility of another career change in the future. When asked directly about what might affect her decision to continue or not in the field, Vivian responded, "I like seeing my kids every day. That is a joy. Politics would prevent me from continuing in the public school system—whether that be everybody's public school system or just ours." Her foremost concern and motivation to persevere on a daily basis was the work she does and the relationships she formed with her students.

Vivian's experience as a paraprofessional was formative and enjoyable, "Being a para—you came at 7:45; you left at 3:00. It was awesome! If I hit the lottery today, I'd be a para." Furthermore, she felt accomplished and competent as a para, "I was very good at my job as a para." However, she also noted frankly why she first considered pursuing a career as a teacher instead of continuing as a paraprofessional: "I thought to myself, 'You know, this is awesome, but it doesn't pay enough.' So, at that point in time,

I thought, ‘Why not go ahead and take the test to be certified.’ Concerning her development, she remarked, “I don’t think I would have learned as much in a classroom as I did from my time spent as a para. I was grateful for that experience.” Even so, when asked if she felt prepared when she transitioned, she remarked, “No. I did not feel prepared at all. That caused some stress....” Earlier, she stated, “It felt like I was kind of just thrown in there. I was like, ‘What?! This is different.’ It was so different!” Despite the initial difficulties adapting to the new role, which she attributed in part to her “being older,” she recognized the importance of and utilized extensively the knowledge she developed during her experience as a paraprofessional.

Vivian regarded both her informal and formal learning experiences positively: “I love to learn. I think once you stop learning, you’re done.” In addition to her experience, formal preparation also contributed to Vivian’s development as a professional and included a variety of trainings related specifically to special education. She felt well supported by her employing district in this regard, even as a paraprofessional, of which she stated frankly that she could attend “anything I wanted.” Similarly, Vivian reflected positively upon her continuing education courses. An excerpt from one of her course reflections indicates her level of engagement as well as her appreciation, “The only way I can describe this semester...is awe inspiring. I have learned so much.”

Vivian reflected that several professionals with whom she worked closely, both as a para and as a teacher, also facilitated her development. The teacher with whom she was first assigned as a para became her mentor. Vivian reported that she was available to her, “Anytime—day or night...If I have a question or concern or anything of need, I feel so comfortable going to her...I trust her completely.” Vivian appreciated capable

professionals who are able to assist in her development: “Seasoned professionals tend to have a plethora of knowledge that new or starting out professionals tend to lack due to inexperience. Don’t try to reinvent the wheel. Collaborate with other professionals in the field to gain knowledge and experience.”

This was an area of growth for Vivian. “I learned...last year to be able to go to people when I needed help. I was afraid to do that. You’re not supposed to know everything.” She regarded her mentor as someone she could speak to for help in developing professional knowledge and skills: “I rely on my mentor for new and constantly changing information in our field of study. It is important we get to know our staff and value what they can teach us.” She held similar sentiments and high regard for her, now former, superintendent. She recalled that his philosophy was straightforward but very sensitive to the needs of students, “Just do your best. Let’s show these kids who don’t see a lot of love—let’s show them some love.” Vivian adopted his approach in her practice, “I love them.” Vivian’s commitment to the field and motivation to continue was perceptible through her expressions of “love” and affection for her students. They were centrally positioned when discussing difficulties she overcame.

Vivian expressed that she benefitted from participating in IEP meetings as a paraprofessional. Therefore, as a novice teacher, she was already familiar with the general structure and components. Further, as she was developing her competence with the special education paperwork, her mentor was frequently available to assist, “We did it together.” This alleviated much of the stress associated with this process. She also acknowledged that simply having to do the work, however uncomfortable, was the best

way to learn the procedural knowledge and protocols involved in the various special education processes.

Vivian regarded herself as competent in several areas, which contributed positively to her transition. When expounding on her effectiveness as a teacher, she explained;

I've never had a problem with classroom management. When the kids come in my classroom, a lot of times they don't know how to behave...Pretty much first day [I establish]—'This is how it's going to be. We're going to learn something. We're going to be respectful of other people.' I never have to send anyone to the principal's office. That's not my thing. I don't like being that person.

The surety with which she spoke and the self-possession this evinced signified confidence as well as competence. Vivian's professional identity as a teacher was developing and paralleled her sense of professional responsibility. Even so, she experienced occasional doubts and work-related tension for which she developed specific coping strategies. "You talk with other teachers; you talk to your spouse. You vent a lot." She continued, "I get up an hour early. I sit. [I] pray a lot—because some days you get up out of bed and you think, 'I don't want to do this today.' And some days, you don't."

Consistently, throughout the record, Vivian's need to be perceived as useful and as a contributing member of the community emerged, "I think she's learned some things from me too." For Vivian, her comments indicate that it was insufficient for her simply to be a learner in whatever context she was active but also a teacher or contributor—with agency and value independent of the specific tasks undertaken or the outcomes. Additionally, the emergence of an underlying and continuous reflection upon worthiness of the endeavor, vacillating between outspoken confidence and tentative concern about

her future in education, signaled her relative instability as a novice teacher. In the same passage, Vivian remarked, “I feel really secure.” And then later, “Oh my gosh! I suck!” This appraisal revealed the tenuousness of her perceived capacity. When asked if she intended to continue teaching, she responded, “Yes, however, special ed has a tendency to burn people out. I hope I do...[but] teaching can be daunting.”

Summary

The case study researcher seeks to identify and understand both what is common and particular to a case (Stake, 1998). As such, I presented that which was common and particular in of each of these cases. Furthermore, I framed each such that factors contributing to our knowledge of the phenomenon of interest, the development of novice, alternatively certified special education teachers, would be evident. From this basis, the next chapter turns to my analysis and representation of the cross-case themes that emerged inductively.

CHAPTER V

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

In Chapter 4, each case was regarded as its own bounded entity with analysis, implications, and inferences limited to the individual cases. This chapter is intended to present emergent cross-case themes and to elucidate, within the limits of the study, how those themes relate to and inform our understanding of the phenomenon of interest: novice, alternatively certified special educator teachers' (NACSETs) perceptions of their development as professionals. As such, each respective theme and sub-theme is presented with a distinctive orientation to a question appertaining to or derived from the research questions: (a) How do novice, alternatively certified special education teachers perceive their development as professionals? and (b) What factors contribute to or detract from novice, alternatively certified special education teachers' development of capacity and commitment? The themes emerging from intensive cross-case analysis are: intentionality, experience, "overwhelmed" to overcoming, and motivation.

Theme 1: Intentionality: Individual or Systemic

How does the intentionality of people or institutional representatives at the various levels constituting the current preparatory system impact NACSETs' development?

Who is responsible for NACSETs' development?

Consistently throughout the case-record, teachers described active engagement in the developmental process. The motivation for this level of involvement was connected

to a sense of professional responsibility and in many cases a personal disposition. That is, teachers implicitly desired to understand their roles, responsibilities, and the particulars of their work so that they might continually improve their practice with ever increasing expertise. “I feel like every teacher needs to continue learning—because there is always something to learn.” “I’m learning as I go. It’s constant evaluation and reflection about what’s working and what’s not.” These expressions of persistence and determination were evident to varying degrees in all cases and evince an active intention to attain mastery of the profession. Additional evidence indicating teachers’ intentional focus was found in their access and use of resources to aid in their development. Some actively sought instructional resources online, through general education or special education counterparts, or from available onsite repositories. Primarily, however, when teachers needed information to fulfill their duties or improve their practice, they deliberately sought out knowledgeable others. Invariably, these individuals were proximally located to the NACSETs—that is, in the same classroom, next door, across the hall, etc. In a few cases, notably Claire and Stanley, participants reported one or more teachers or administrators took an active and intentional role in developing their professional capacity.

Participants reported not discerning a formal program intended to systematically induct, support, and facilitate their continued development in an individualized manner. Some participants acknowledged that a mentor was assigned or made available yet with minimal impact (as discussed below). Administrators often were mentioned as resources but in a restricted and passive sense. They were viewed as available generally, but provided specific support only when solicited. Claire commented, “He’s very

supportive. I could go to him at any time during the day and [say], ‘I need help...’ and he would totally sit down and find me the right person to go to.” Olivia echoed, “...they are able to answer [my question] or guide me to the correct person.” However, when asked how support was provided, she replied, “[I’m] seeking them out.” Further, supervisors appeared active in teacher development only periodically corresponding to mandated formal evaluation.

Certain structural features of these NASCETs’ schools, usually dependent on the size of the school (e.g. rural or urban-cluster, elementary or secondary), likewise influenced perceptions of responsiveness. Rural schools, which tended to be more communal and conscious of community issues, embraced the NACSETs personally and therefore were more responsive to their needs. Stanley reflected, “Being in a small school, the resources are limited as one can expect at a small school, but people are very friendly and helpful. All the teachers are in the same boat...so, people have to help each other a lot.” However, even in those instances, teachers’ developmental needs were not monitored consistently and closely by school administration. Generally, teachers “figuring it out” were largely left to do so on their own and with the resources they could access and incorporate from their immediate context.

In terms of district-level activity intended to promote teacher development, mentors were assigned to most participants to assist them in their first year. However, participants rarely reported their assigned mentors being involved in day-to-day concerns. Diane reflected, “The [assigned] mentor teacher I had was fabulous. She knew what she was doing; she just wasn’t as available—as in opening my door and asking the teacher next to me.” Nancy’s experience was less positive, “...my mentor never helped me.

When I asked [for help] she was very short, ‘Well, I did it this way so that is what you need to do.’” Further, as far as these participants reported, no one mentioned that the appropriateness of these pairings was evaluated nor success towards affecting development monitored. In fact, in several instances, it was counter-productive. Nancy recalled when she asked a question of her director regarding curriculum,

She just would say, ‘Ask your mentor...’ who I was supposed to be asking—who I would ask, and she wouldn’t [help]. So, I would go to [the director], ‘I’m not getting anything....’ It was kind of a back and forth effect—like a tennis ball being hit one side to the other.

Orientation programs, where instituted by districts formally, provided extensive amounts of information but without intentional scaffolding or accommodations for NACSETs. Districts apparently classified NACSETs merely as new teachers with developmental needs approximate to their traditionally prepared counterparts. They were included, without differentiation, in generic orientation activities, which tended to overwhelm rather than help in their transition. Claire remarked, “For me personally, it was throwing me into a group of two hundred other teachers and telling me a good probably four packets of paperwork worth of things in a matter of three days. There’s so much information—you can’t even retain it.”

In terms of “central office” support, Marie was the only case who referred to frequent contact and active support. In apparent contradiction, Nancy communicated frustration at the refusal of her repeated requests for instructional resources. “I didn’t feel like I had the support to get the things I needed—even with asking and writing POs. I never got anything approved.” There was some indication that districts intentionally graduated individual teacher’s caseloads where it was possible to do so. Teachers operating in larger districts had smaller caseloads initially with incremental increases

with each year of experience. It is unknown whether this was programmatic or circumstantial. Generally, participants felt under-supported or ambivalent about district-level support.

At the state level, support for NACSETs was perfunctory and procedural. The OKSDE was not actively determining or providing guidance on which courses were appropriate for NACSETs. University representatives or the participant himself or herself determined which courses were appropriate and essential to their preparation and ongoing professional development. According to the Non-Traditional program requirements, the coursework was “prescribed” (Oklahoma State Department of Education). However, “prescribed” coursework simply meant that the university was to assist the teacher (prospective student) to identify an existing program (e.g. Masters of Special Education) or develop an individual plan of study to complete the coursework. At the university level, however, evidence suggested minimal intentionality on the part of the administration, faculty, or advisors to identify the specific educational (professional) needs of the participants.

When Claire was asked directly in a follow-up interview, “Has anyone been intentional about guiding you to take specific courses based on your specific needs as a new special educator?” She responded, “No. As far as knowing the classes I needed to take, I had to do a big run-around and try to find [the information].” Thus, the courses that teachers decide to take are often determined by convenience rather than through a rigorous and deliberative process of determining, based on a teacher’s past work experience, current job assignment, success taking the certification exams, etc., what each respective teacher needs to develop efficiently as a professional. Tera stated in response

to being asked how she chose her graduate course, “Initially, the ones that I was taking were just the ones that fit into my schedule...for the summer.” Generally, cases evinced ambivalence about coursework—commenting positively on the benefits of the learning community as well as reinforcing past learning, though this was sometimes regarded as redundant. This was reflected in Clair’s comments:

[Everything] has not been super beneficial at the moment. They were things I was already kind of familiar with. I feel like I could use more instruction in behavior management and actually creating lesson plans and delivering the information to the variety of students. I think that would be the three main things that would benefit me personally. It seems like all the information is kind of repetitive in the other classes. It’s just always kind of a general ‘kids with special needs need this’ and ‘this is what you would expect’—it’s not, ‘this is what you should do’ or ‘this is how this might work.’

The lack of attention to specific professional needs is depicted in Figure 5.1, a representative plan of study. It does not address the needs expressed by many to develop pedagogical competence or basic classroom management. Courses that would do so were frequently offered at the undergraduate level. Thus, learning “how to teach” remained primarily the responsibility of the individual teacher, and the resources he or she had available to assist with that development were those in the immediate work environment or tangentially accessible.

2. Eighteen Hours to Completion		
EDUC 5212 Psychology of Teaching	2	Spring 2015
EDUC 5203 Educational Practices	3	Summer 2015
EDUC 5373 Curr. Develop. for Teaching Students with Mild/Moderate Disabilities	3	Fall 2015
EDUC 5500 Practicum (taken concurrently with EDUC 5373)	1	Spring 2015
EDUC 5383 Leadership in Special Education	3	Fall 2015
EDUC 5583 Assessment and Diagnosis	3	Spring 2015
EDUC 5392 Clinical Procedures for Teaching Students with Severe/Profound Disabilities	2	Summer 2015
EDUC 5500 Practicum (taken concurrently with EDUC 5392)	1	Summer 2015

Figure 5.1. Plan of Study provided by participant.

Many expressed an acute sense of professional responsibility. Yet frequently in the case-record, NACSETs described taking intentional steps to develop themselves only to be frustrated in their efforts due to lack of recognition and constructive response at other levels. Where fellow teachers, supervising administrators, and university faculty were responsive to the needs of the participants, they responded positively and perceived to enhance their capacity. Primarily, however, based on the data, deliberateness and intentional activity rested with the individual participants to affect the necessary adaptations and to coordinate their own developmental activities and course.

I chose to take on the role of being a teacher. That has only helped the process, yes. I think there are probably teachers who would be okay with just getting by. But I really want to do good for these kids, and I really want to do the best that I can. I think my main goal is to be effective for them—to know the processes, to know what I need to, to know the resources that I need for them to graduate from high school and be effective adults.

Theme 2: Experience: Formative and Consequential

How do NACSETs perceive experience, prior and/or ongoing, as contributing to their development?

When reflecting on their transition and early developmental progress, experience emerged as a factor highly valued for these NACSETs. As is indicated in Table 5.1, several of the teachers had experience teaching prior to becoming a special educator.

Table 5.1.

Number of Years' Experience by Type (e.g. social work, paraprofessional, counseling).

CASE	TEACHING	SPECIAL NEEDS	OCCUPATION
OLIVIA	0	0	2
NANCY	0	3	3
CLAIR	0	7	7
CAROLINE	1	6	11
DIANE	3	3	3
MARIE	5	5	5
TERA	5	5	5
VIVIAN	6	5	6
STANLEY	15	0	30

However, only Diane, Marie, Tera, and Vivian had experience as paraprofessionals in special education settings, and they frequently attributed their competence in certain areas (e.g. classroom management, specific instructional strategies) to that experience. That is, their capacity as special educators was already somewhat developed. Tera related specific elements that the teacher she formerly assisted used that she had adapted to her current setting:

...just being able to remember some of the practices that she used and how she approached her kids because she really cared about them. I think that being a para has helped tremendously in my becoming a teacher—just being able to use the experiences that I had.

When Marie was asked, “How did you learn how to teach?” She responded directly, “By being a para.” Perhaps most telling, with respect to those who had prior teaching experience in a special education setting, was an exchange with Tera in which she was asked what advice she would give to incoming teachers pursuing alternative certification:

I would ask them things like, ‘Have [you] had prior experience in SPED?’—because I think that is a very big part of being successful. When you’re looking at longevity—if you’ve never worked in special ed and you just want to go into it because you’ve...been around some students with special needs, [it] is a lot different than being around it day to day in a school year. I think you need that experience first. It’s worth it if that is where your heart is. It’s tough. It’s not easy, and it’s crazy. It’s a lot of work. I think the main thing is having that experience prior to going through [the process].

What if someone doesn’t have that experience but has a job already?

[Has] a job in SPED?!?

Yes.

Whoo. That is a hard one.

She was openly shocked that anyone without experience in a special education setting would choose to become alternatively certified as a special educator and yet, over half of the cases in this study did not have this experience.

Teaching experience and experience working with individuals with special needs was noted as helpful. Stanley was a practiced teacher, yet did not have experience working in a formal capacity with individuals with special needs. He articulated how his prior experience as a teacher and other life experiences prepared him for his current work:

I think my previous experience in college and teaching probably helped me most in being a teacher—in presenting material. I've learnt, especially being in a cross-cultural setting, to think on my feet—on how to bring over different ideas [and] make them understood. It's very similar to teaching special ed. Being on the job has helped smooth my sense of being comfortable with what I am doing.

He also remarked:

I did teach in a college. I taught those who could think well and those who couldn't. But, now that I'm teaching in special ed., it is actually a lot more difficult than I had anticipated. It is a lot more challenging to reach students with learning disabilities who cannot comprehend what I've said, and I have to plumb the depths of my knowledge and resources to get them to understand and think in different ways than they think they are able to. So, it is very challenging—and rewarding.

This data indicated that despite Stanley's experience and proficiency as a teacher as well as his adaptability, he struggled to adjust to his role as a special educator. Claire, on the other hand, had extensive experience and was comfortable working with individuals with special needs yet struggled to regulate in and orient to the academic setting and teaching.

She reflected on her initial feelings entering the classroom and ongoing struggles:

I was terrified—nauseous and scared. I wasn't exactly the best way to help them and not be helping them too much. I'm getting there. It depends on the student. Some students I still have no idea how I am going to help them or what I could do

different or better—or if there’s really anything I can do. I’m still trying to figure that out.

Both Stanley and Claire, again neither of whom had experience in a special education classroom, identified the utility towards increasing capacity of simply being in the classroom. When asked why he made a specific alteration to his practice, Stanley replied, “Experience.” Claire replied similarly when asked how she intended to become as proficient as one of her peers to whom she was comparing herself: “I would think just more time, honestly—more just doing the same thing over and over.” In other words, experience.

Claire, Nancy, and Olivia were each in positions where they could observe and learn from other teachers. Caroline and Olivia were co-teaching. Nancy was working as a paraprofessional. Nancy’s perspective gives additional insight to special education teaching capacity as a function of specific experiences. She began as a teacher then transitioned to a paraprofessional position. She attested that this relatively unsuccessful and disappointing teaching experience actually improved her subsequent learning. When she transitioned to the paraprofessional position, because she had been a teacher, she knew what she needed to know and was able to focus her learning.

I feel like this time has been kind of a student-teaching kinda time. [The] teacher that I am with now, she’s let me teach lessons, she lets me give assessments, she asks my opinion on what would be good for the kids to do or what I would do. And I really feel like I have learned so much from her that I could step into a classroom now—and be comfortable and know what I was doing. And [I’m] just glad to have been with somebody that was so welcoming and ready to teach me.

These comments, in conjunction with the former, demonstrate the benefit of prior experience in a special education classroom as a paraprofessional or working closely with professionals who, through modeling, provided a framework in which to situate new

experiential knowledge. For the participants, specific experience in specific contexts, teaching in a special education classroom, was recognized as formative for ongoing development. Participants expressed the need to have a place to start, an essential knowledge base, and a place to finish, a model for what a professional special educator does in practice. Diane's comment makes evident this tension,

I think that because I had been a para for three years and because I got to see the good and the not so good, I think I had a pretty strong idea of what I wanted my classroom to look like and what I wanted to be able to present and how I wanted to be able to do it.

Theme 3: “Overwhelmed” to Overcoming: Becoming a Teacher

How do NACSETs overcome various struggles in the process of developing as professionals?

“At first, it was extremely overwhelming!” Diane exclaimed when describing her first experience in the classroom as a teacher. She continued, “I felt so overwhelmed with figuring out how to manage my classroom, how to prepare lessons, and then being so scared of the paperwork and the contact with parents—it was so overwhelming that I thought...’Is it even worth it?’” This refrain emerged throughout the case-record. However, for some teachers in this study, the stress and struggles were excessive. Several participants confided that during this process, they had sought counseling, and in some instances, medication to manage feelings of depression and/or anxiety. Participants indicated that unpreparedness, inexperience, and difficulty managing competing demands contributed to their feeling of being overwhelmed. Caroline's comment captures this sentiment: “There were many days that I was simply overwhelmed with school, practicum, the transition to a new position, and other life commitments.” Elsewhere, she remarked, “I just didn't know what I was doing. And that was frustrating because one of

the things I discovered about myself is that I do need to have some sense of mastery about what I am doing.”

Lack of knowledge or a sense of competence pervaded participants’ reflections on their development. Each case gave expression to his or her sense differently but consistently. Competence had different forms corresponding to the different roles and responsibilities of a special education teacher. Teachers’ formal preparation prepared them for some aspects of the profession. However, their knowledge, when divorced from actual experience, was largely abstract and untried. Teachers felt like they were “jumping in” blindly or, more brutally, were, as Nancy related, “thrown to the wolves.” This was most notable in the case of Nancy who acclaimed the benefits of the several forms of training (i.e. boot camp and coursework) yet who, when tasked with actually teaching, remarked,

It was very overwhelming. I came from a whole different world. It was difficult in the beginning, I thought, ‘How do people do this?’ I loved it; I loved what I was doing. It just was eye-opening—how difficult it really is.

The confluence of perspectives, that of “loved what I was doing” and “how difficult it really is,” exemplifies teachers’ general appraisal of their early experiences.

Their reasons for pursuing special education, which for many was firmly established, beneficent, and person-centered, seemed to balance their perspective while enduring the challenges of transition. Diane remarked,

The kids. I mean, they are the reason I started in the first place. And they kept me strong. I had seen the bad, and I didn’t want them getting that again. I wasn’t going to let it happen. And I knew it would get easier—I mean, I knew it had to. I could look around and see not everyone was as stressed as I was. So, I knew it got better—and it did.

Participants who had experience comparable to that which they encountered upon entering the field, tended to manage the transition more effectively than those with little to no experience. Caroline, Claire, Nancy, and Olivia were the most inexperienced in terms of prior teaching experience and, in fact, struggled more significantly with cognitive and emotional overload. Caroline and Nancy are no longer employed as teachers.

Analysis indicated a recurring thread in which teachers describe struggling to manage competing demands. Caroline indicated in three separate data sources, which she provided from a period of over two years, evidence of her ongoing difficulties. These were related to the practice and particulars of teaching or special education; some were related to the combination of satisfying certification program requirements and the former: “I could not figure out the nuts and bolts of getting it done...I was once again overwhelmed by the demands of trying to complete two college course while teaching in what turned out to be a challenging situation.” Additionally, frequent references to time limitations highlight teachers’ sense of inadequacy: “I feel like I spent so much time on paperwork that it took away from my interaction with my own students, and that’s why I did it in the first place. I felt like I was spending all my time grading and IEPs and preparing for meetings.” In the cases of Caroline and Nancy, lack of individualized, meaningful, and ongoing support also accompanied their sense of being overwhelmed. Finally, not perceiving progress in their development of expertise and effectiveness contributed to teachers’ perceptions of being overwhelmed, Caroline’s in particular. “I am sure there are things I learned, there are some things that I got better at, but ultimately it was not enough.”

Though the difficulties introduced categorically above were manifold and prodigious in their impact on teacher development, equally evident were the supportive factors that contributed to teachers' overcoming of those difficulties—and ultimately, continuing their professional development and identity formation. Various strategies described in the case-record indicated teachers' gradual partitioning of their professional and personal lives in order to cope. This partitioning corresponded to their development and was, itself, an indication of development. Participants demonstrated their burgeoning knowledge of the need for self-care. One teacher described a strategy she adopted in her former work as a counselor and reapplied as a teacher:

...one thing I learned from there is don't take your problems home. We all had keychains—when you take off your keychain...you left your job there. That is one thing that I learned. So, when I came here and I feel like I'm having problems or thinking about this, 'Okay, Olivia, you have to take off your keychain. You have to leave your problems and deal with it the next day.'

Similarly, Claire described her progression in the following way: "In the beginning of the year, I would come in early and stay late, and other teachers got on to me for that. They said that I'm going to burn-out if I do that. And so, I go home." Consistently, teachers found ways to cope with their work and growth related stress: "I talk to my dad...and pray a lot." "...when I am struggling with something, I just leave and I go do something—shopping or something, eat or get a drink. And [when] I come back and sit down, by then my stress level has come down some, and I'm able to finish what I was struggling with before." By contrast, Caroline evinced minimal development, despite her spirituality. Her view of her role as a teacher and her life while working was unitary—without evidence of discriminant organization of priorities. Further, her relational base

was notably constricted. Thus, where Claire was responsive to her community's counsel and able to separate the professional from the personal, Caroline was not.

Additional factors contributing to teachers' professional development emerged through cross-case analysis and provide insight into the process, including: (a) community (b) competence, (c) consciousness of development, (d) professional identity formation, and (e) growth. Each of these factors contributed to participants' overcoming and, ultimately, becoming teachers in how they act, think, and feel.

Sub-Theme: Community: The Personalization of Support

NACSETs demonstrated a consistent need for and benefitted instrumentally from the relationships that they formed with their classmates through formal and informal professional learning communities (e.g. boot camp, continuing education courses), their colleagues, their students, and specific individuals in their expanded and encompassing communities (e.g. parents, community members, etc.). Fellow teachers were identified repeatedly as the foremost resource from which NACSETs solicited assistance. Diane recalled, "That's the only way I got through it was having someone to whom I could say, 'I'm really confused. Help me.'"

Proximity promoted availability and access and seemed, in turn, to strengthen relatedness. Participants identified individuals who were physically closest and regularly available as those who most influenced them in their early transition, acclimatization, and development. Claire described a teacher that intentionally sought to assist her and who became an invaluable resource; Diane, Marie, and Vivian's partner teachers provided key support early in their transitions; Stanley and Tera were supported by fellow teachers or administrators in their immediate environments. By contrast, Caroline, Nancy, and

Olivia did not have or, perhaps, did not make themselves available to a level of connectedness that fostered professionally beneficial outcomes.

The NACSETs receptivity to assistance was as important as the availability of the support. At Caroline's final review as a practicing teacher, she was concerned about "some of the ways she perceived my performance and my interactions with other teachers. [It] was very uncomfortable for me." She was subsequently prompted to resign voluntarily or take a position as a paraprofessional. She resigned. Olivia modified her approach from one of intentional separation to one of deliberate integration and described the monumental change this made in her practice:

If I feel like I am getting [overwhelmed], I have to step back and then go ask for help instead of just trying to do it all by myself because that is one thing that I've always done. What I've learned over the past three years is, if I don't know it, just ask for help—instead of worrying about it. That's been something that I've done different [this year] from the past two years. If I don't know, I'm on the phone right away calling one of my co-workers...[or] going to go find them.

What brought about that change?

I've grown as a person. Instead of just trying to keep things to myself, I'm trying to get out there and get advice from people or have a conversation with people. I think that happened last year...when I went to a co-worker's house and we were all there. I think that was when it changed—I was like, 'Huh, okay. I can go mingle with people. These are my co-workers that I'm going to be with.' We forgot about school and were just ourselves.

I include Olivia's description of this formative experience in its entirety because it demonstrates an instance in which personal relatedness appeared to promote professional relatedness. Nancy's circumstances changed such that she was placed in a support role, which allowed her to develop the relatedness she desired and from which she subsequently benefited. She felt stifled and her progress as a teacher until she entered an

environment that was responsive to her needs: “[I was] just glad to have been with somebody that was so welcoming and ready to teach me.”

Participants expressed an understanding of the pedagogical importance of relationship. In every case, students were prioritized. Additionally, these relationships had motivational value. Tera summarized, “[I enjoy] my relationships with my kids. That’s the biggest thing that I enjoy is just knowing who my students are and understanding them—having that relationship with them. More like a mom figure as opposed to a teacher.” Diane reflected similarly, “The relationship between all my paras and myself and the students [is]...unbelievable. I just feel like it is a real, heartfelt relationship on such a higher level. It’s really intense. They’re just my kids, and they know it.” Thus, teachers’ conception of a personal network of support involved a sense of relatedness and connection, bracing and preparing, understanding and encouraging.

Certain environmental factors and structural elements contributed to participants’ feeling integrated into their respective communities. Stanley, who is employed in a rural district, remarked, “Being a small school, the resources are limited as one can expect in a small school, but people are very friendly and helpful. Overall, everyone’s really helpful—all the teachers are in the same boat.” Vivian and Tera shared similar sentiments. Participants’ initial job assignments also appeared to contribute to their integration into extant communities. Vivian, Marie, and Diane began teaching where they had formerly worked as para-professionals. These factors and others accompanied their integration and, consequently, their development.

Another emergent characteristic that was perceived as a demonstration of professional development was participants’ sensitivity to, affiliation to and responsibility

in the broader special education community including their responsibility to and role in that community. This was particularly evident with Marie and Vivian. Marie was conscious of her professional community. At one point she remarked, “More than likely, I’m not the only one that will have that problem that day.” And later, “I am sure that if I am the one who had the question, then the person next to me did too.” Marie’s individuality as a teacher was often oriented in and diffused by her perception of being one amongst many. Vivian, too, was conscious of her contributions to the community. She remarked of her mentor, “We fit from the get-go. It was a good fit. When she needed me, I was there.” And later, “I’ve learned from her...and I think she’s learned some things from me too.” “I have realized that it is difficult to become a master of everything as well as special education. Collaboration is key to being successful as a special educator.” From their immediate personal networks, teachers were provided essential resources, which evidently aided in their transition to the field and development as professionals.

Sub-Theme: Competence: A Many-Sided Figure

Participants’ development in the area of professional competence appeared to depend on their prior experience and their successful integration into their immediate professional communities. At the micro-level, competency involved proficiency with classroom management, classroom organization, grading, management of resources, and professionalism in relating to students and other professionals within the classroom setting (e.g. paraprofessionals, related service providers). Those who had prior experience in the classroom represented a moderate level of development. Diane, Marie, Tera, and Vivian were all experienced paraprofessionals and expressed feeling competent

in certain areas. Diane remarked, “I knew what I was doing in the classroom, but the other [SPED related knowledge] I was not prepared for.”

The cases varied in terms of competence related to knowledge of special education paperwork, procedures, and processes as well as practically in how to work with students with special needs. Those who participated in the boot camp entered the classroom with a conceptual knowledge of what those various processes entailed (e.g. IEP development). The para-to-teacher route provided less preparation in this regard which is reflected cogently in Diane’s remark, “It took a good year, year and a half before I felt comfortable going into a meeting or contacting a parent and feeling comfortable doing that. That was definitely the most difficult transition.” Diane came to perceive herself a proficient in this area though she initially viewed it as her weakest. This contrasts with many of the boot camp attendees who struggled to attain proficiency in practice but felt more prepared initially based on their training. Many echoed Tera’s sentiment: “I think I feel most confident in those abilities—of the paperwork part.” Where she and many indicated that they struggled most were in the areas of pedagogical and content-related competence.

Caroline summarized: “I didn’t know how to individualize their instruction enough...I was just trying to learn how to teach.” What to teach, or the specific content and sequence, were occasionally identified. Claire, who is a high school co-teacher, opined that her knowledge of specific content (e.g. biology, physical science, algebra) was inadequate and therefore required significant effort to function effectively as a teacher in those areas. More often, she was learning with her students.

I’ve kinda just been doing whatever I can to jump in; so, I’m not educating them on the topics very well. Usually, I’ve been listening to the lecture and then I’ll

jump in and try to help students as I can. It's kind of been a weakness, in my opinion.

She continued, "It would be a lot easier if I was knowledgeable specifically about the detailed topics that I'm supposed to be teaching." Tera and Olivia described similar experiences; both are also teaching in high schools with responsibility for multiple subject areas. Nancy struggled to identify appropriate curricula and individualizing instruction based on the needs of the students. Caroline stated plainly, "I did not know how to teach 5th grade math. I could take that child who has trouble with dividing and teach him how to divide. I can't teach them the whole 5th grade math curriculum."

Stanley commented, "That's probably been the hardest factor—not knowing what to do in a specific way." He clarified, "I might know basic math—the math is not difficult, but trying to get students who do not understand it to understand it—the actual transference of knowledge—that is the really hard discipline." This distinction clarifies the difference perceived by participants between having content knowledge and teaching content.

Perceptions of capacity varied between participants. However, as they perceived themselves to become more competent, their perception of their effectiveness and "comfort" applying their knowledge likewise improved. This is consistent with the literature related to competence and supports the assertion that capacity is important to teachers' perceptions of effectiveness, which is discussed in Chapter 6. Furthermore, as is indicated in Diane's statement, "I want to know more...for my own benefit and for my students," participants' desire for competence was related directly to their commitment to their students.

Sub-Theme: Conscious of Development: The Objective View

Participants who were or who became conscious of themselves as learners and of their transition into teaching as a multifaceted learning process were more adaptable in their approach to teaching and comfortable managing the struggles they encountered therewith. They were receptive to being taught and to learning from their experiences. Furthermore, they appeared to manage their stress levels more effectively when they could objectively regard their progress. Diane reflected, “I knew it would get easier—I mean, I knew it had to. I could look around and see not everyone was as stressed as I was. So, I knew it got better—and it did.” Cross-case analysis indicated the emergence of this awareness throughout—particularly with those who were more stable in their positions. Claire, Diane, Marie, Stanley, Tera, and Vivian all gave indications of this awareness. Nancy and Olivia demonstrated an inchoate awareness. In contradiction to this claim, Caroline appeared highly aware yet was unable to manage, at a personal and professional level, the process such that she could progress adequately. In fact, her heightened sense of professional responsibility, viewed in connection to her perception of inadequate progress in the process of development, appeared to stymie or thwart growth. She appeared oversensitive and hyperaware of perceived faults as well as her delayed progress. “There were very good teachers. And I could sit and watch them and say, ‘Wow, that is so cool.’ But I was years away from ever having that kind of confidence in the classroom.”

Tera’s reflection on her progress in the field exemplified this theme, “At first it was a little odd and awkward...it’s gotten easier. I still don’t feel like, ‘I’m there.’...I feel like I always need to be learning something. Eventually—it’s going to take time, but

eventually, I'll get there." The acknowledgement of her difficulties, of her continuous desire to increase her knowledge and skillfulness, and of the expectation that it would take time to develop all signified a consciousness that promoted development. The expectation, either internally or externally, imposed or exacted, that one should "know everything" impeded development. Claire and Diane both began with this perspective, but it modulated with experience. Diane remarked in reference to her change of perspective on IEP related paperwork, "Before, I thought it was all on me, and I had to have it perfect and ready like I was presenting, and I figured out that was not what I was supposed to be doing. Now I can just do it, and I'm like, 'Yep, it will work' or at the meeting we can change what we need." Again, participants evincing a recognition and understanding of their place and progress in a developmental process, who acknowledged deficiencies and accessed available resources, experienced an alleviation of stress and anxiety associated with a lack of knowledge or contextual uncertainty. "Once I figured that out, it wasn't nearly as stressful—and then I could just care. That has made my job a whole lot easier and a whole lot more fun—because I'm not stressed."

Sub-Theme: Professional Identity Formation: The Subjective View

Stanley reflected, "I guess that my colleagues saw that I really was already a teacher except not in practice. So, they encouraged me to take it to the next level." Stanley's case is unique in that he had more than fifteen years of experience teaching prior to his entry into special education. While he admitted that this did not prepare him perfectly for his work as a special educator, he identified himself as a teacher, "...teaching has been a fundamental part of my life. Even when I am not teaching, I'm always teaching." Tera's comment, however, reflected the perspective consistently

represented across cases: “[It] was a struggle at first trying to figure out who I was as a teacher—what kind of teacher I wanted to be.” Participants’ conceptualization of themselves as teachers was varied and distinctive. Tera continued, “I am different from normal...at least, I don’t feel like I am a normal, everyday special ed teacher.”

Several participants intimated that once they finished their respective programs and become fully certified they might identify themselves as teachers; others did not refer to such points of demarcation or ascendancy. Rather, many appeared to simply grow into their identity in a relatively unconscious, subjective manner. Diane described her progression with parents,

I felt like I was this outsider coming in. They’ve been with their kid for twenty years, and I’m coming in telling you what I’m going to do and what I think is the best thing. But my mindset changed [after two years]—‘This isn’t my job to tell you what [your child needs]. It’s our job. Tell me what you think and we’ll figure it out.’

According to Diane, no event affected this change directly. It simply happened—her mindset changed. Participants appeared to come to identify themselves as teachers while teaching. The perception of increasing competence seemed also to contribute to participants’ identification as teachers. Marie commented, “Before, when I first began, I was stressed about—‘Am I putting this right? Am I stating this right—or the correct way?’ Now, I just do it.” Diane reflected this in her comments on the development of her professional attitude:

It’s kind of funny because I was quite content just being a mom and just having a side job [as a paraprofessional]. I was content with that. But now—I need more. I need to know more about [my students]. I think I am becoming more of a learner where I was much more complacent two to three years ago. Now, I want to know more and what we can do about it—for my own benefit and for my students.

Possessiveness, “my students,” “our students,” and “my kids,” occurred throughout the case-record. Marie stated succinctly and inclusively, revealing her association, “We have to teach them. That’s where we come in.” Vivian commented conclusively and with apparent identification as a teacher, “At the end of the day, if we as educators have done our job, the kids are reaping the huge reward. As are we.”

Sub-Theme: Growth: An Integrative Approach

I need more. I need to know more about ‘What’s the background disability?’ I need to know everything about it—everything. I think I am becoming more of a learner where I was much more complacent [before]. But now, I want to know more...for my own benefit and for my students.

Every case claimed and demonstrated a disposition to learn. Many acknowledged the necessity for teachers to learn continually. Olivia remarked, “I feel every teacher needs to continue learning—because there is always something to learn; I am always learning something new—something that can be beneficial for me in the classroom.” While this perspective was consistently represented throughout, how participants acquired and integrated their knowledge varied from person to person. Some were deliberate in their practice; others, more “on the fly”—or, as Claire remarked, “I am learning as I go and trying my best.” Even so, a trend emerged suggesting the organic nature of learning. The knowledge teachers acquired from the various sources (i.e. formal training, continuing education, on-the-job, informational and relational resources, etc.) required integration into practice to produce growth. Tera stated, “It’s constant evaluation and reflection about what’s working and what’s not.” Claire reflected similarly, “...it just comes with practice and experience.” Where integration was unsuccessful, growth curtailed. Sometimes integration was impacted by environmental

factors—sometimes by personal characteristics. Caroline’s remarks are insightful, “I could not figure out the nuts and bolts of getting it done in that building.” She continued,

...everything they told me, every reason that teachers were giving me for reasons to do something different, made sense to me. But it got to where I just didn’t know how to do it. You know, it all made sense. I just didn’t know what I was doing. And that was frustrating because one of the things I discovered about myself is that I do need to have some sense of mastery about what I am doing.

This disequilibrium, which was caused by a variety of factors (discussed at length in Chapter 4), was never resolved. Repeated frustration, conflicting personal and professional expectations, an unstable base of relational support, a performance oriented culture, and other factors appeared to collectively thwart Caroline’s development and perception of her own capacity. She reported being unable to function in the specific context and circumstances she encountered in her last position. Similar episodes are described in other cases. However, her case is the most extreme and illustrates the benefits, by contrast, of an integrative approach.

An additional characteristic that emerged was difficult to classify. It variously appeared in the case-record in the form of “figure it out”; rationalizing and reorienting or “it happens”; surviving or “go with it”; “jump in”; and “learning as I go.” Each phrase described a participant’s response to the difficulties they encountered in their work as novices. Each phrase signified a participant’s particular determination to overcome whatever difficulty was being described and an attitudinal orientation: *I can* versus *I can’t*. Resilience, persistence, and a seemingly indomitable will to succeed emerged repeatedly. Diane’s comment reflected these characteristics: “I overcame it by just doing what I do.” Stanley similarly remarked, “Okay, now I have to do with what I have, and finding that maybe I made a bad choice. And having to make the best out of whatever I

have chosen to do.” Again, these characteristics align with the growth perspective and appeared to provide the motivation to persist. It did not emerge as a singularity or entirely discrete phenomenon. Other factors appeared to contribute to its continuance and sustainability. However, the will to persist, to carry-on despite personal discomfort and professional set-backs, aligns with the growth perspective and fits into the overarching developmental framework. Commitment to field and to continual improvement, in this instance, appeared to facilitate capacity enhancement.

Theme 4: Motivation: *I Care*

The kids. I mean, they are the reason I started in the first place. And they kept me strong.

Whereas previously, the development of emergent themes was guided by a question or questions, this theme emerged indirectly despite its prevalence and consequence. Consistently, participants articulated their basis for entering the profession initially and reasons for staying as simply, “the kids.” Marie stated plainly, “The kids come first.” The prioritization of students’ needs and support was evident, as was the participants’ expressed enjoyment in working with and relating to their students. Caroline and Stanley, who were neither effusive in their expressions nor made continual emotional overtures, remarked respectively, “I really enjoy working with kids...” and “I think dealing with the kids...seeing them as people develop. That is what I enjoy most.” Others were more expressive, indicating clearly an affective relational bond. Tera stated plainly, “I love all my kids. I do.” Vivian similarly commented, “Well, I love them.” Remarks such as these were evident throughout the case-record.

The intent to “help” motivated many participants to enter the profession. Nancy succinctly explained her reason for pursuing an alternative route to certification, “I

decided I wanted to...become a special ed teacher because the special ed population is really the group that I identify most with—that I can help and just love.” Further, it appeared to provide an ongoing motivation as indicated in Marie’s comment, “I teach...basically, just to help my kids.” Olivia remarked similarly, “I feel like I’m doing something and helping kids out.” She continued, linking her desire to help with her motivation to persist in the field,

I just know one of my main goals is just helping kids—no matter what age they are. So, me not wanting to do that or help kids—I can’t picture that! I think I would want to do this, help kids and teach them new ways. I think I will stay with it.

Nancy acknowledged that helping students originated in her recognition of their unique needs—to which she could respond, “SPED kids need a lot more support. They need those extra words of encouragement, those extra hands clapping for them.” This recognition resulted, for many, in a sense of responsibility.

Diane reflected both the joy and the burden in fulfilling her responsibilities as a special educator:

I believe I have the best job on the planet! I get to hang out with amazing students all day long. I get to walk into a classroom full of wide-eyed, open-hearted teenagers who are truly happy to see me. I have the ability to influence the next generation, however a career as wonderful as teaching comes with great responsibility.

This sense of responsibility extended, for many participants, to one of improvement—that is, they felt compelled to improve their proficiency as teachers for the good of their students. Tera remarked, “I really want to do good for these kids, and I really want to do the best that I can. My main goal is to be effective for them—to know the processes, to know what I need to [know], to know the resources that I need for them to graduate from high school and be effective adults.” Vivian echoed this remark, “You get to know these

people that are eventually going to be driving around, helping people out, and, hopefully, being productive people of society. And you want to do the best you can to make that possible for them.”

In several instances, this sense of responsibility resulted in active pursuit of services—or advocacy. It was pronounced in Nancy’s case where she recognized a marginalization of special education. “They say, ‘Oh, it’s just special ed; it’s just last on the list.’” She was remarking on her perception of the prioritization in her district of special education students’ curricular needs. After gaining some experience as a teacher, she communicated that she felt better able to identify and differentiate specific curricular needs: “I know what to advocate for. Coming in, I didn’t know what to advocate for; now, I know. ‘Okay, this is important. I need this. I need someone to help me get it.’” When asked how she would advise incoming teachers, she replied, “Be an advocate for your needs as well as our student’s needs. Don’t be afraid to ask.” Advocacy, for Nancy, was care in action.

Care in action was not restricted to advocacy. Many participants recognized their “care for their students” as a means of assisting in the attainment of their educational goals. Olivia reflected in an artifact, “When special educators show that they care for their students and are able to gain that trust with them; then it’s easier for them to have that safe, fun, learning environment [in which] to learn.” Nancy also linked educational outcomes and “care” in an artifact, “I [want to] stay student and family centered and not get to [sic] focused on the paperwork and remember why I chose to become a special education teacher, which is to provide students...with the best education and care that I

can give.” Tera, likewise, recognized the importance of maintaining this focus, “I think it really helps out because you are close to them. I really do care about them.”

“Care” also manifested as relational support. Tera commented frequently on its importance, “I really try to focus on my relationship with them—which is being that support for them.” Again, she remarked, “One of my main concerns is really focusing upon getting to know my students and it not just being about curriculum and classwork.” The provision of this relational support sustained her commitment to the field, “I do continue to do it. I do enjoy it. [I have] a passion for my kids, and [want] to be somebody like a supportive role in their life for them. I think that’s important to me. It’s big.” Similarly, Vivian remarked that her relationship with her students was sustaining, “I like seeing my kids every day. That is a joy.”

Interestingly, reciprocal actions or behaviors indicating the receipt of care also emerged as a perceived indicator of success for several participants. It was clearly evinced in the following exchange with Claire:

When do you feel successful?

When the students are successful.

How do you gauge that?

When they see me at stores or at Walmart or something like that and they’re like, ‘Hey, Ms.-----. Happy to see you!’ And they are excited to see me, I’m like, ‘Yes, they like me!’ Just different times like that I can ensure that they know that I care. I want to be able to make their day better by seeing them.

The desire to demonstrate “care” and motivation derived from “caring” permeated the case-record and characterized the comportment of the majority of participants. For many, their initial resolution to enter the classroom was predicated on the belief that they could, through teaching, actualize their desire to help children, to make a difference in

their lives—to care. Any diversion from this central motivational source appeared to frustrate participants, which suggests commitment in the form of devotedness to a purpose and people. Diane clearly stated,

I feel like I spent so much time on paperwork that it took away from my interaction with my own students, and that's why I did it in the first place—was for them and what I thought they should be receiving in the classroom...

She continued to state that when she was able to regulate those concerns, "...it wasn't nearly as stressful—and then I could just care." Management of environmental stressors permitted Diane to do that which gave her most satisfaction in her work—care for her students. This simple expression evinced what emerged as a central, unifying theme and was summarized in Tera's reply to the question, "How are your students going to remember you?" "I hope that they remember me as someone who cared about them and helped them as much as she could."

Summary

The novice, alternatively certified special educators represented in this study were a unique group of individuals with specific needs and characteristics. Much of their formative development as special educators occurred while employed rather than prior to employment. The disproportionate volume of knowledge they had to process in order to attain a functional level of proficiency impacted their developmental process as well as their perspectives as teachers. At the time of this study, many were still "in-process" respecting their development of professional expertise and coordination of effort and knowledge construction. Stanley remarked, "I'm consciously having to think about what I have to do." Yet, cross-case analysis indicated a positive developmental trajectory. Key themes emerged consistent with this developmental trend including: intentionality—

wherein the locus of intention was found to rest primarily with the participants; experience—wherein it was demonstrated that key formative experiences occurring before or during development were influential in shaping teachers perspectives of their progress; “overwhelmed” to overcoming—wherein relatedness, competence development, developmental awareness, professional identity formation, and a growth orientation were recognized as integral emergent features; and finally, an underlying sense of “care” for their students that fundamentally impacted participants’ motivation and perceptions’ of their experiences as novice teachers, their roles, and ultimately, their commitment. These findings provide insight into factors that contribute to or detract from the developmental experiences of novice, alternatively certified special educators.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Teacher shortage is a recurring issue—particularly in special education (Cowan, Goldwater, Hayes, & Theobald, 2016; McLeskey, et al., 2004). This is due, in part, to attrition rates (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008), a reduction in teachers entering the workforce through traditional university-based teacher preparation programs (Aragon, 2016), and an increasing need (deBettencourt & Howard, 2004). Essentially, the demand is greater than the supply. This is especially true in Oklahoma (Palmer, 2017). Therefore, in order to maintain the special education teacher workforce in Oklahoma, the state education agency in conjunction with the state legislative body developed alternative routes to teacher certification. Notably, as subsets of the teacher population, novice teachers, alternatively certified teachers, and special education teachers have been more prone to attrition than their experienced, traditionally prepared, general education teacher counterparts (Brunsting et al., 2014; Ingersoll, 2001; Redding & Smith, 2016). Thus, in implementing alternative routes to certification for special education teachers in order to address evident market deficits, teachers entering the profession are at high risk for attrition. It is of long-term importance for the field of special education that the “bucket” is filled as well as the “holes” patched (Ingersoll, 2007)—that is, that high quality special

educators are recruited as well as retained—this includes novice, alternatively certified special education teachers.

Consequently, I conducted a qualitative case study (Stake, 1998, 2006) in Oklahoma with nine novice, alternatively certified special education teachers (NACSETs) for the purpose of exploring their perceptions of their preparation and development as professionals. Sindelar et al. (2010) and Brunsding et al., (2014) asserted that the development of special educators' capacity (knowledge and competence) and commitment to the field were of foremost importance and correspond to the reduction of attrition. Therefore, I also inductively explored teachers' perceptions of their development in relation to professional capacity and commitment to the field. Alternative certification of special education teachers is a relatively new phenomenon and thus warrants ongoing and in-depth examination (Quigley, 2010; Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005). Moreover, no research was found that explored how NACSETs perceive "becoming a teacher" (Rosenberg et al., 2007). The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do novice, alternatively certified special education teachers perceive their development as professionals in Oklahoma?
2. What factors contribute to or detract from novice, alternatively certified special education teachers' development of *capacity* and *commitment* in Oklahoma?

Discussion

In the exploration of the phenomenon of interest, the development of novice, alternatively certified special educators as professionals, I examined nine (uniquely positioned, variously qualified, similarly prepared) teachers' perceptions of their

developmental experiences in the course of their preparation to teach and transition into teaching. Their experiences and perspectives were similar or differed based on a variety of personal, environmental, and individual historical factors. Those who had experience in a setting similar to that in which they began their teaching careers appeared more confident and comfortable in their work initially. Generally, these individuals had worked as paraprofessionals in special education settings and thus were familiar with the students, teaching, and the professional and specific culture of their schools. However, several also felt unprepared to manage the formalities of the profession having had little or no experience with IEPs, formal evaluations and eligibility determinations, and engaging with parents. In one respect, their experience prepared them for the new role and facilitated their transition. However, lack of specific knowledge related to the field was initially an impediment. This particular difficulty is typical of novice special educators (Billingsley, 2005).

By contrast, those who participated in the “fast-track” route to the classroom, or boot camp, demonstrated a level of comfort with the formal aspects of special education, yet struggled immensely to acquire footing in how and what to teach. The boot camp apparently provided, in condensed form, adequate training on the formal aspects of the profession but insufficiently prepared teachers with regard to pedagogical practices and curricular content. It was not surprising then, that these participants struggling to “survive” reflected negatively on this preparation experience. Such struggles may be attributable to the abbreviated delivery and lack of ongoing support throughout their transition; however, the participants attributed it to not knowing “how to teach.” Quigley (2010) expressed concern that pedagogical knowledge and practice, essential for

effective teaching as a special educator (Connelly et al., 2004), was inadequately addressed in many programs. “If pedagogical training...[is] reduced or eliminated, personnel preparation will fail to provide the prospective educators with vital information and practice relative to the very nature of their role as special education teachers” (p. 51).

Connelly et al. (2004) agreed:

Special education teaching is not like subject-matter instruction, and training methods based on the subject matter model do not fit special education well.

Special education teachers require extensive training in pedagogy, instructional accommodations, behavior support, and communication skills that complement verbal ability and subject knowledge expertise. (p. 123)

The apparent insufficiency of pedagogical training in the boot camp program model is a concern. For participants with the advantage of prior experience in the classroom, this difficulty was tempered. In fact, one participant was asked directly, “How did you learn to teach?” to which she responded, “As a para.”

Difficulties learning to teach are also relatively typical of novice special educators who are acclimating and adjusting to professional norms and developing pedagogical and professional competence. Billingsley (2004b) acknowledged the “fragility” of novice special educators and advised “responsive induction programs and supports for beginning special educators” (p. 271). For programs facilitating alternative routes to certification, Wasburn-Moses and Rosenberg (2008) offered as their first guideline, “Promote initial classroom survival,” by which they meant the provision of timely, responsive support through mentorship and specific educational resources. Further, they advised including as a part of the induction, “organizational methods, communication strategies, paperwork

completion techniques, resources for support and collaboration, as well as stress management” (p. 259). As was discussed in Chapter 5, no participant was formally inducted. A few attended “new teacher orientation” but this merely entailed becoming familiar with their school site and site-specific procedures. Systematic induction, conducted by either an IHE or LEA, may have improved transition and early adaptability. Presently, however, they are left “figuring it out.”

Participants’ perceptions of their continuing education experiences, similar to the boot camp, were ambivalent. The benefit they gained from their coursework rarely focused on the content or strategies that they learned; rather it was upon the relationships that they formed and relational support they felt. Shared experience often predicated relationship formation. More broadly, relationships emerged as central to participants’ transition and development. Repeatedly, participants noted that it was not institutional support (i.e. from LEA, SEA, or IHE) that impacted their perceptions of connection or fostered their growth. It was people—individuals who demonstrated their genuine interest in the success and well-being of the participant through intentional actions and responsive, individualized support. Access and availability repeatedly emerged as important to participants’ sense of relatedness and its formative professional benefits. Where participants perceived this connectedness and engaged meaningfully and constructively in these relationships, fortitude and capacity were enhanced. Personal relationships appeared to form from professional necessity, which in turn, strengthened teachers’ sense of belonging to the profession as contributors. Corresponding to this, Brownell and colleagues (2002) and Leko and Smith (2010) found that collegiality,

collaboration, and shared decision making fostered positive work environments and thereby enhanced retention.

For the participants, not only was connection important, so too was competence. This was represented specifically in the sub-themes of “Competence: A multi-sided figure” and “Growth: An integrative approach.” Participants were driven to know, to perform, and to attain proficiency commensurate to their personal and professional expectations—both internally and externally generated. They expressed dissatisfaction when they perceived deficiencies in their own practice or understanding. Generally, however, with deliberate and intentional pursuit of knowledge, relational support, and the amelioration of effective practice, they increased their confidence and comfort—suggesting developing capacity. Consistently, participants expressed recognition of the value and function of on-the-job training, or experiential learning. They sought out opportunities to learn from experienced teachers in diverse contexts in order to extend their knowledge and increase their competence. This trend may be attributable to their status as non-traditional learners for which these behaviors are typical (Caffarella & Barnett, 1994). As Wasburn-Moses and Rosenberg (2008) have noted, “...they have a need for active, in-context learning, and show adeptness at finding and solving problems and grappling with ambiguities” (p. 262).

A related concern that emerged was that independent access to and familiarity with other credible sources of information (e.g. research-based practitioner-oriented texts, discipline specific journals, professional organizations and associations, online databases, or resources affiliated with reputed institutions) was negligible. Innocuous and uncritical online resources (e.g. pinterest, teachers-help-teachers) were more often referenced than

credible resources to cultivate ideas or acquire information related to instructional or behavioral concerns. Familiarity with the former more popular resources and lack of time to search more intensively were cited as reasons for not pursuing other more credible resources. Participants' limited exposure to and familiarity with relatively easy-to-access, credible resources may warrant a programmatic adjustment consistent with that suggested by Wasburn-Moses and Rosenberg (2008).

The progression from a sense of deficiency to proficiency, from "I was not prepared—at all!" to "I really enjoy it. I'm very comfortable with it!" outlines the developmental progression of many of the participants. It was evident that some were more conscious of their development than others. In fact, they all began in different places developmentally. Yet, generally, the participants approached their work with the hopeful expectation that they were progressing and that proficiency, or expertise, was ultimately attainable. Various motivational factors were involved in this progression. However, it became evident that underlying all of the motivational vicissitudes, striations, and perturbations was the constant "I care." Ultimately, participants seemed to focus upon their students and continued working towards proficiency for their students. Initiation and ascendency in their respective professional communities was regarded as part and parcel with their continuation in those communities; however, their students, who seemed always immediately and consciously present, provided stimulus for growth. Billingsley has cautioned, "Many special educators do not survive the path from hopeful beginner to highly qualified, experienced teacher" (2004b, p. 371). Perhaps, helping NACSETs to regulate and moderate secondary concerns in order to keep foremost their

concern for their students, which in this study was a prominent and prevalent characteristic, will amplify commitment.

Generally speaking, this study provides evidence that despite innumerable factors which are often recognized as major deterrents to developmental progress, i.e. lack of structural supports, lack of programmatic cohesiveness, lack of intentionality or individualization of development (Billingsley, 2005; Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005), participants were able to appropriate some benefits of their respective preparation programs and specific work environments to “figure it out.” Further, and more encouragingly, there was evidence that even unstructured support and meaningful, reflective experience aided in the development of the way teachers think, act, and feel as teachers. No definitive conclusions can be drawn about retention. However, all participants, excepting Caroline, expressed their intent to continue.

As has been discussed, commitment is associated with a variety of positive outcomes (Billingsley, 2004b). However, few supports that would reinforce commitment, except at the personal level, were evident. It may be that the commitment the participants possessed, which presented as relatively stable, was already semi-formed because of participants’ deliberate choice to enter the field despite the prevailing adversarial and unappealing climate. Further, all of the participants are career-changers. This may predispose them positively towards the field and students in particular as was indicated in the “Motivation: *I Care*” theme. Billingsley (2004b) recommended further study into the “degree to which initial commitment contributes to subsequent career decisions” (p. 50). The current study supports this initiative.

The critical case (Patton, 2002) provided an agonizing picture of personal and professional discomfiture. As was presented comprehensively in Chapter 4 and often as a counter-reference in Chapter 5, Caroline encountered difficulties throughout her process of development as a professional. Her heightened sense of professional responsibility, the need to perceive herself as competent or achieving mastery at some level, the lack of relational support, the instability and incongruity of her work environment, and eventual dissolution of self-belief that she was capable of becoming an effective special educator may have contributed to her discontinuation. In her case, the process apparently failed. However, causation cannot be attributed to any one factor. Remedial and intentional actions supporting such individuals who are similarly faltering in their developmental progression may be achieved, as Rosenberg and his colleagues (2007) recommended, through IHE and LEA collaboration. These measures might include timely, direct, and intentional support with both an instructive as well as affective component. Caroline's comment echoes hollowly, "The system is not good at supporting new learners—without a background in education."

There is no indication that Caroline cared less than other participants as might be inferred from the theme "Motivation: *I care*." In fact, the frustration of her attempts to actualize "care" through the various circumstances previously related, may have so demoralized her that she was not able to maintain productive engagement. The disappointment that she expressed, "My experience with teaching really derailed my life in a lot of ways..." may signify more care, not less. This is consistent with DeMik's (2008) conclusion, "The same passion that gave these teachers the drive to remain in the

job and continue to help students with disabilities also drove some of them out of the field” (p. 31).

The preceding synthesis and summary describes what emerged from the case through intensive, continuous, and multi-faceted analysis. Further, it connects to a variety of themes already well developed in the literature as well as others that are less so. Brownell and Smith’s (1993) conceptual model provided a framework by which various levels of support could be explored and participants’ perspective of their influence gauged. While I can make no definitive statements, it was evident that interactions between these levels, including systemic incongruities and disparities, had an impact. These interactions sometimes converged advantageously to meet the participants’ needs and sometimes diverged such that intents and purposes were controverted and the participants were perplexed. Primarily, micro- and meso-system factors were perceived by participants as the most influential contributions to their integration into the workplace and teacher workforce. However, it is uncertain how these factors might, over the course of time, influence participants’ subsequent career decisions. Cross and Billingsley (1994) posited that the longer teachers persist in the field, the more likely that will persist indefinitely to become career teachers. Although, the limitations of this study, including its duration and methodology, preclude any conclusive statements in this regard, longitudinal quantitative and qualitative studies following the career progression of NACSETs may allow for more definitive linkages to be established between the interactional effects of systemic factors on career decisions.

Deci and Ryan’s (2000) self-determination theory also provided a useful framework by which to approach NACSETs’ development as professionals. Relatedness

and competence emerged with pronounced saliency. Relatedness, as evidenced in relationships with mentors, colleagues, parents, students, and fellow classmates, appeared to stabilize participants' while they developed their capacity as teachers and strengthened their commitment to the profession. Additionally, competence emerged as important and was identified both as a discrete domain (e.g. SPED, pedagogy, content/curricular, and professional) and an inclusive and unitary psychological dimension. Participants' recognition of their increasing competence in specific knowledge domains and overall capacity, the perception of general capability as a special educator, were linked to their perceptions of development as professionals. Despite its evident utility, I can make no assertions except that the findings appear to align with the assumptions of the theory. The study reinforced what was already known about the theory, and the theory illuminated elements of the process of development studied here. It may be beneficial to continue to examine how self-determination theory helps to explain the various processes involved in the development of NACSETs as well as what, if any, definitive programmatic steps might be taken to incorporate insights gained therefrom.

I have introduced Billingsley's (2005) "Leadership Framework for Teacher Retention" several times through the course of this study, as well as her so-called "retention-enhancing" factors, which included responsive induction programs, deliberate role design, positive work conditions and supports, and professional development opportunities (Billingsley, 2004a). Throughout this study, I worked from the assumption, consciously and unconsciously, that without these structural elements and deliberate, intentional action on the part of institutional leaders, teachers would not develop sufficient capacity and therefore commitment to persist in the field. As Billingsley

(2004a) noted, “Inadequate preparation leads to ineffective practice...” and increased risk of attrition (p. 371). Intuitively, I linked “fast-track” preparation to ineffective practice and therefore reduced engagement, thwarted development, and, ultimately, attrition (Quigney, 2010; Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2001). However, the majority of participants in this study perceived themselves as developing and increasingly effective teachers though no formal institution of these retention-enhancing factors was apparent. From this, we might tentatively intimate that something else was occurring in the process that sustained their engagement, facilitated their growth, and integrated them into the profession.

At the conclusion of this study, seven of the nine participants were still practicing (78%) with one of the two who was not practicing intending to re-enter upon completion of her program. This is comparable to statistical projections for early-career traditional, alternative, and special education teachers (Gray & Taie, 2015; Redding & Smith, 2016). Furthermore, evidence indicates that the participants were developing as professionals along several indices of expertise (Berliner, 1994, 2001; CEC, 2012). From this and the fact that throughout and across the study, participants sustained avowals of commitment despite unpropitious situational and circumstantial conditions, the participants were becoming, in perception, professionals—more distinctly, professional special educators. Certainly, Caroline’s case is a cautionary tale, yet of the cases included in this study, it was anomalous. Rosenberg and Sindelar (2001) asserted, “...effective teaching cannot be simplified so as to facilitate a hasty entry to the profession” (p. 25). This may be true. However, the plethora of personal and environmental factors that contribute to this process are unaccounted for in this simple assertion. This case study provided evidence

that the development of NACSETs is highly nuanced, situational, and requires additional consideration.

Finally, this study also identified the uniqueness of each individual NACSET as compared to his or her fellow participants—and as a group amongst professional educators. The uniqueness of their perspectives and individual characteristics provided insight into the distinctiveness of their individual pursuits to become special educators. Thus, based on this study, individualization of support, where it can be instituted systematically and programmatically, may be more effective than formal “one-size-fits-all” formatting. There was no uniformity in the supports participants received, nor their individual experiencing of the developmental process. Further, consciousness and intentionality on the part of those responsible for developing NACSETs at the local and institutional levels may improve sensitivity and responsiveness to individual developmental needs.

In summary, this study indicates: that the development of the participants as special educators was organic in nature—involving a variety of environmental and personal factors; that support structures were provided, for most participants, incidentally; that of those instantiated, proximal relationships with knowledgeable peers were most beneficial; that capacity and commitment were found to be implicitly interconnected and related to development of professional practice and identity formation; that the participants demonstrated resiliency, persistence (all expressing intent to continue excepting Caroline), and continual and integrative growth as professionals; and that participants’ affective relational bonds to their students provided motivational

impetus, for most, to enter the profession and to continue—as well as a desire to help, advocate, and improve themselves professionally for their students.

At the conclusion of this study, many questions remain: Who is responsible for ensuring NACSETs are developed appropriately? Is ease of entry, as Rosenberg and Sindelar (2005) and others suggests, easing the standardization of professional practice? Are programmatic elements, such as those delineated by Wasburn-Moses and Rosenberg (2008), necessary or are other modulations that satisfy the same intents possible? There is still much to know about the development of NACSETs, which this study did not address. However, Sindelar, Brownell, and Billingsley (2010) emphasize, “Learning more about the knowledge, beliefs, practices, and induction of minimally prepared teachers and models to support them should be a priority” (p. 16). Billingsley (2004b), too, recommends, “Future studies should address teachers’ perspectives [and] observations of their work lives...to provide a better understanding of important contributors to job satisfaction, commitment, stress, and career decisions” (p. 52). Thus, this study, in a very limited way, may contribute to the furtherance of knowledge about NACSETs perspectives in relation to their development as professionals and their transition to the field. Recommendations for practice are subsequently provided.

Limitations

Qualitative research is limited by its purpose, parameters, and methods. Due to the utilization of case study methodology and the distinctiveness of the cases and conditions I studied, the findings are not generalizable, and their relevance outside of the specific context in which the study was conducted is limited. This is consistent with the expectation set forth by Stake, “The purpose of case study is not to represent the world,

but to represent the case” (1998, p. 104). However, had I employed a different methodology or increased the number of participants and modified the parameters, I may not have been able to study the phenomenon of interest as intensively nor explored its nuances as thoroughly as I did. Furthermore, the distinctiveness of the educational climate in Oklahoma at the time of the study and the specific nature of the preparation programs included in this study warranted some limitation of focus and incidentally allowed me to hold constant, in the analysis, certain aspects of the system in order gain further insight. Lastly, due to the utilization of a theoretical framework, the phenomenon of interest was viewed through the lens of those theories. Nevertheless, I do not think it detracted from the meaningfulness of the study and findings but rather heightened my sensitivity as a researcher to certain elements and trends which these theories frame. Despite these limitations, useful knowledge about teachers’ perspectives was garnered which, hopefully, when added to existing literature, will contribute to improved practice, strengthened theoretical understanding, and integration with and continuation of worthwhile research.

Implications

Practice

Again, revisiting Billingsley’s (2005) framework, despite the incidental occurrence, many elements were not evident in a systemic form. While her retention-enhancing factors (2004a) were originally intended for traditionally prepared special educators, the applicability of this framework to NACSETs seems appropriate based on the perceptions of participants included in this study. Similar to traditionally prepared special educators, NACSETs’ needs are unique at both the individual and group level.

Distinguishing them from traditionally prepared novice teachers seems judicious. Evidence from this study indicated that administrators might benefit from receiving specific training on and guidelines for how to best support NACSETs with regard to induction, support (including mentor assignment), and ongoing professional development. Such training might include information about the importance of providing clear expectations related to specific contextual issues as well as more general expectations about individual teachers' developmental progress—scaffolding their understanding of the developmental process and providing appropriate support on their level of development (Hattie & Yates, 2014; Leko & Smith, 2010). Intentionality on the part of administrators and districts to tailor support to meet the specific needs of NACSETs, particularly early in their transition, is anticipated to reduce stress related to systemic inefficiency or incongruities (Brownell and Smith, 1993) and augment professional capacity and commitment (Sindelar et al., 2010).

The continuation and broadening of meaningful support, both personal and professional, has been recognized as beneficial for NACSETs (Sindelar & Rosenberg, 2005; Wasburn-Moses & Rosenberg, 2008). Therefore, the organization of social support networks utilizing social media platforms, already easily accessible, could be appropriated to the task and may help to widen and decentralize NACSETs' supportive community. While on an individual level, several participants referred to ongoing supportive relationships with their fellow boot camp attendees and teaching peers, broader professional support networks were not accessed or known to exist in this particular context. Further, a “help-line” or direct access service for immediate support related to content and/or special education specific questions, with service providers that

understand the unique conditions in which NACSETs are working, could improve support as well as maintain professional standards. Coordination and collaboration with institutions of higher education may assist in the development of these services and provision of additional virtual tools.

NACSETs consistently articulated that they received minimal individualized or specific recommendations on which “professional education courses” they should take from institutions of higher education. Rather, they were placed in existing programs or independently decided which courses to take based on availability and convenience—not content or professional need. It may be useful to develop an assessment instrument or survey which would aid in the deliberate identification of particular areas of need for individual teachers based on their past experience, current position, and personal strengths and preferences. This then, might be used to decide on specific professional education courses meeting the explicit needs identified by the NACSET, and thus better individualize and scaffold development. It is possible that such an instrument would help to account for individual differences based on past experience and/or training and differentiate institutional support. Unless there is already extensive experience in the classroom, it may be useful to require, at minimum, a course about pedagogical practices and classroom/behavior management and, where possible, specific methodological courses related to teachers’ specific teaching assignments (i.e. elementary, high school science, etc.).

Various alternative preparation models exist (Rosenberg et al., 2007). It was suggested by several of the participants that the time and energy required to maintain employment and continue their education was extensive and difficult to manage—

particularly as novices. A model that facilitates on-the-job training in an integrated fashion, rather than in addition to their already stressful workload, may be beneficial. It might improve not only the effectiveness of the learning exercises, due their immediate utility and the provision of feedback, but also reduce stress through processes integration and support extension. It is widely recognized that distributed versus massed practice improves long-term retention (Hattie & Yates, 2014). Participants themselves recommended a reconfiguration of the boot camp, extending it over a longer period of time and incorporating more opportunities for observation and supervised practice as a way to improve transition and teacher effectiveness. IHE and LRE collaboration and coordination may be assistive (Rosenberg et al., 2007). Further, co-teaching or other conceptualizations of incremental integration may function as an intermediate step and compliment a model such as this. These suggestions align with those provided by Wasburn-Moses and Rosenberg (2008). A reconfiguring of existing programs, particularly “fast-track,” to follow the guidelines they delineate may improve participant outcomes.

Reconceptualizing the orientation and function of the boot camp and similarly designed programs also might assist teachers who are participating. The compressed learning format was prohibitive and constrained rather than fostered retention of knowledge—except in particular circumstances. Excessive cognitive load and emotional depletion were evident throughout the case-record. Hattie and Yates (2014) have discussed intrinsic and extraneous cognitive load. Intrinsic cognitive load relates to a specific task and its impact is determined by prior knowledge. Extraneous cognitive load relates to the specific learning conditions and the instructional context. These definitions

capture the perspectives of the participants. Perhaps, if coordinators of “fast-track” programs and other individuals involved in preparing and supporting NACSETs (e.g. administrators, university instructors) were to communicate a typical framework for development that helped participants to envision the process in its entirety and recognize their relative position in that progression, participants might better regulate their responses to the ensuing cognitive and emotional strain. Complementary forms of delivery and instruction in pedagogical practices, specific methodology, and other essential content knowledge would likewise need to be developed and integrated over time. However, this curricular adjustment or reorientation away from informational delivery to psychological preparation, or some combination of the two, in addition to the other proposed changes may improve the process of preparation, transition, and continuing development of NACSETs.

Research

The Non-Traditional Special Education program or boot camp is a condensed instructional model, and its long-term effectiveness remains uncertain. Therefore, like Rosenberg and Sindelar (2005), continued qualitative and quantitative examination of the long-term effectiveness of such models is warranted. Redding and Smith (2016) speculated that, “various organizational supports for new teachers may deter turnover” due to “successful learning on the job” (p. 1116). The current study identified organizational supports that were assistive in the developmental process. However, none were systematized, therefore, no conclusions were forthcoming. “Organizational supports” comparable to the “retention-enhancing” factors (Billingsley, 2004a) require continued study to determine nuanced qualitative impact.

In this study, the development of NACSETs as functioning professionals was notably organic as well as organized. Consistent with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), relatedness and competence emerged as distinct psychological dimensions contributing to teachers' overall perceptions of their development and functioning. It may be beneficial to continue to examine the organic nature of development of NACSETs in varied contexts to determine what underlying principles, beyond those already recognizable, might be at work in the process of their development as professionals. Even though autonomy was not recognized in this study as salient, longitudinal studies likely would benefit from the incorporation of this dimension and provide a more complete picture of the self-determined behavior of NACSETs.

Again, Sindelar et al. (2010) emphasized, "Learning more about the knowledge, beliefs, practices, and induction of minimally prepared teachers and models to support them should be a priority" (p. 16). Similarly, Billingsley (2004b) remarked, "Future studies should address teachers' perspectives [and] observations of their work lives...to provide a better understanding of important contributors to job satisfaction, commitment, stress, and career decisions" (p. 52). The current study was significantly limited in scope despite its advantage of depth. Therefore, continued investigation into the personal characteristics and perceptions of special educators pursuing alternative routes to certification is necessary. Furthermore, most programs are different; as are the individuals participating in those programs. Therefore, until such time as programs are coordinated to be uniform and participant entrance requirements standardized, continued in-depth study will be both necessary and beneficial.

Finally, though attrition of special educators and alternatively certified teachers is well represented in the literature (Billingsley, 2005; Boe & Cook, 2006; Christophel, 2003; Kozleski et al., 2000; Redding & Smith, 2016), every instance is unique. Thus, as Caroline's case was informative and instructive to future practice, additional in-depth, inductive studies into the experiences of special educators participating in alternative routes to certification that leave prior to completing all certification requirements would likely benefit both those who are coordinating the programs and those who are supervising or mentoring participants directly.

Conclusion

In order to stay the recurrent cycle of attrition and offset the diminishing number of traditionally prepared special educators, a continuous and thorough examination of teacher preparation and development is crucial. Consideration of programmatic features that promote teacher capacity and commitment, enhancing retention, may stabilize the field. This stabilization of the field and regulation of the general proficiency of teachers (i.e. professional standardization) is anticipated to improve system efficiency, teacher productivity, and overall student learning outcomes. Teachers are born and made. However, it seems, professionals are made—not born. So it is with novice, alternatively certified special educators. The intentional and incidental, that is, organic, preparation and development as professionals of the NACSETs who participated in this study appeared to increase their capacity and commitment and, it may be hoped, retentive potential. This study sought to illuminate one small section of the “iceberg” which is special education teacher preparation (Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005). There is much yet to explore.

REFERENCES

- Adera, B. A., & Bullock, L. M. (2010). Job stressors and teacher job satisfaction in programs serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 15(1), 5-14.
- Agee, J. (2009). Developing qualitative research questions: A reflective process. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22(4), 431-447.
- Aldridge, J. M., & Fraser, B. J. (2016). Teachers' views of their school climate and its relationship with teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction. *Learning Environment Research*, 19, 291-307.
- Anfara, V. A., & Mertz, M. T. (2015). *Theoretical frameworks in qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Angelo, L. (2011). *IDEA national assessment implementation study*. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20114026/pdf/20114027.pdf>
- Aragon, S. (2016). *Teacher shortages: What we know*. Retrieved from <http://www.ecs.org/ec-content/uploads/Teacher-Shortages-What-We-Know.pdf>
- Beachboard, M. R., Beachboard, J. C., Li, W., & Adkinson, S. R. (2011). Cohorts and relatedness: Self-determination theory as an explanation of how learning communities affect educational outcomes. *Research in Higher Education*, 52(8), 853-874.
- Bereiter, C., & Scardamalia, M. (1993). Chapter 4: Expertise as process. In *Surpassing ourselves: An inquiry into the nature and implications of expertise* (pp. 77-120). Chicago, IL: Open Court.
- Berliner, D. C. (1988). *The development of expertise in pedagogy*. Washington, DC: AACTE Publications.
- Berliner, D. C. (1994). Expertise: The wonders of exemplary performance. In J. N. Mangieri & C. C. Block (Eds.), *Creating powerful thinking in teachers and students* (pp. 161- 186). Fort Worth, TX: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Berliner, D. C. (2000). A personal response to those who bash teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(5), 358-371.
- Berry, A. B., Petrin, R. A., Gravelle, M. L., & Farmer, T. W. (2012). Issues in special education teacher recruitment, retention, and professional development:

- Considerations for supporting rural teachers. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, 30(4), 3-11.
- Billingsley, B. S. (1993). Teacher retention and attrition in special and general education: A critical review of the literature. *The Journal of Special Education*, 27(2), 137-174.
- Billingsley, B. S. (2004a). Promoting teacher quality and retention in special education. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 37(5), 370-376.
- Billingsley, B. S. (2004b). Special education teacher retention and attrition: A critical analysis of the research literature. *The Journal of Special Education*, 38(1), 39-55.
- Billingsley, B. S. (2005). *Cultivating and keeping committed special education teachers: What principals and district leaders can do*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press & Council for Exceptional Children.
- Billingsley, B. S., Brownell, M. T., Israel, M., & Kamman, M. L. (2013). *A survival guide for new special educators*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Billingsley, B. S., Byecha, J., Smith-Davis, J., Murray, K., & Hendricks, M. (1995). *Improving the retention of special education teachers: Final report*. (Prepared for the Office of Special Education Programs, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education, under Cooperative Agreement H023Q10001).
- Bittistelli, A., Galletta, M., Portoghese, I., & Vandenberghe, C. (2013). The mindsets of commitment and motivation: Interrelationships and contribution to work outcomes. *The Journal of Psychology*, 147(1), 17-48.
- Boe, E. E., Bobbitt, A. S., Cook, L., Whitener, S. D., & Weber, A. L. (1997). Why didst thou go? Predictors of retention, transfer, and attrition of special and general education teachers from a national perspective. *The Journal of Special Education*, 30(4), 390-411.
- Boe, E. E., & Cook, L. H. (2006). The chronic and increasing shortage of fully certified teachers in special and general education. *Exceptional Children*, 72(4), 443-460.
- Boe, E. E., Cook, L. H., & Sunderland, R. J. (2008). Teacher turnover: Examining exit attrition, teaching area transfer, and school migration. *Exceptional Children*, 75(1), 7-31.
- Borman, G. D., & Dowling, N. M. (2008). Teacher attrition and retention: A meta-analytic and narrative review of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(3), 367-409.

- Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2006). How changes in entry requirements alter the teacher workforce and affect student achievement. *Education Finance and Policy*, 1(2), 176-216.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1976). The experimental ecology of education. *Educational Researcher*, 5, 5-15.
- Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, A. A. (2006). The bioecological model of human development. In R. M. Lerner & W. Damon (Eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology* (pp. 793-828). New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Brownell, M. T., Sindelar, P. T., Bishop, A. G., Langley, L. K., & Seo, S. (2002). Special education teacher supply and teacher quality: The problems, the solutions. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 35(2), 1-16.
- Brownell, M. T., & Smith, S. W. (1992). Attrition/retention of special education teachers: Critique of current research and recommendations for retention efforts. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 15, 229-248.
- Brownell, M. T., & Smith, S. W. (1993). Understanding special education teacher attrition: A conceptual model and implications for teacher educators. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 16(3), 270-282.
- Brownell, M. T., Smith, S. W., McNellis, J. R., & Miller, M. D. (1997). Attrition in special education: Why teachers leave the classroom and where they go. *Exceptionality*, 7(3), 143-155.
- Brunsting, N. C., Sreckovic, M. A., & Lane, K. L. (2014). Special education teacher burnout: A synthesis of research from 1979 to 2013. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 37(4), 681-712.
- Caprara, G. V., Barbaranelli, C., Borgogni, L., & Steca, P. (2003). Efficacy beliefs as determinants of teachers' job satisfaction. *Teacher Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95(4), 821-832.
- Career development program path for paraprofessionals to attain teacher certification. (2016). Retrieved from <http://sde.ok.gov/sde/career-development-program-path-paraprofessionals-attain-teacher-certification>
- Christophel, S. R. (2003). *A comparative study of attrition factors of central Florida exceptional education teachers based on certification preparation program* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Cohen-Vogel, L., & Smith, T. M. (2007). Qualifications and assignments of alternatively certified teachers: Testing core assumptions. *American Educational Research Journal*, 44(3), 732-753.

- Connelly, V. Rosenberg, M. S., & Sindelar, P. T. (2004). CLD position statement: Alternative routes to certification in special education. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 27(2), 122-123.
- Constantine, J., Player, D., Silva, T., Hallgren, K., Grider, M., Deke, J., & Warner, E. (2009). *An evaluation of teachers trained through different routes to certification*. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=NCEE20094043>
- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. L. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- Cordeau, M. (2003). *Mentoring alternatively certified teachers: Principals' perceptions*. Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Cowan, J., Goldhaber, D., Hayes, K., & Theobald, R. (2016). Missing elements in the discussion of teacher shortages. Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.3102/0013189X16679145>
- Cross, F. (2016). *Teacher shortage areas nationwide listing 1990-1991 through 2016-2017*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oep/pol/tsa.pdf>
- Cross, L. H., & Billingsley, B. (1994). Testing a model of special educators' intent to stay in teaching. *Exceptional Children*, 60(5), 411-421.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Cuddapah, J. L., & Burtin, A. S. (2012). What all novices need. *Educational Leadership*, 69(8), 66-69.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). How teacher education matters. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(3), 166-173.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Chung, R., & Frelow, F. (2002). Variation in teacher preparation: How well do different pathways prepare teachers to teach? *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(4), 286-302.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2003). Keeping good teachers: What leaders can do. *Educational Leadership*, 60(8), 6-13.
- deBettencourt, L. U., & Howard, L. (2004). Alternatively licensing career changers to be teachers in the field of special education: Their first-year reflections. *Exceptionality*, 12(4), 225-238.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227-268.

- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2008). Self-determination theory: A macrotheory of human motivation, development, and health. *Canadian Psychological Association*, 49(3), 182-185.
- Deci, E. L., Vallerand, R. J., Pelletier, L. G., & Ryan, R. M. (1991). Motivation and education: The self-determination perspective. *Educational Psychologist*, 26(3 & 4), 325-346.
- DeMik, S. A. (2008). Experiencing attrition of special education teachers through narrative inquiry. *The High School Journal*, 92(1), 22-32.
- Demonte, J. (2015). *A million new teachers are coming: Will they be ready to teach?* Retrieved from <http://educationpolicy.air.org/sites/default/files/Brief-MillionNewTeachers.pdf>
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1998). *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Eger, A. (2015, August 22). State Superintendent Joy Hofmeister addresses teacher shortage, ACT pilot program in Tulsa. *Tulsa World*. Retrieved from http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/education/state-superintendent-joy-hofmeister-addresses-teacher-shortage-act-pilot-program/article_d5dfa3b8-8814-52e4-aed7-1b50883e6fd3.html
- Elliot, A. J., McGregor, H. A., & Thrash, T. M. (2002). The need for competence. In E. L. Deci & R. M. Ryan (Eds.), *Handbook of self-determination research* (pp. 361-387). Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Fall, A., & Billingsley, B. S. (2011). Disparities in work conditions among early career special educators in high- and low-poverty districts. *Remedial and Special Education*, 32(1), 64-78.
- Feistritzer, C. E. (2008). *Building a quality teaching force: Lessons learned from alternate routes*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Feistritzer, C. E. (2011). *Profiles of teachers in the U.S. 2011*. Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/media/pot2011final-blog.pdf>
- Fish, W. W., & Stephens, T. L. (2010). Special education: A career choice. *Remedial and Special Education*, 31(5), 400-407.
- Flores, B. B., Desjean-Perrotta, B., & Steinmetz, L. E. (2004). Teacher efficacy: A comparative study of university certified and alternatively certified teachers. *Action in Teacher Education*, 26(2), 37-46.

- Frank, A. R., & Keith, T. Z. (1984). Academic abilities of persons entering and remaining in special education. *Exceptional Children*, 51(1), 76-77.
- Friend, M., & Cook, L. (2013). *Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Gersten, R., Keating, T., Yovanoff, P., & Harniss, M. K. (2001). Working in special education: Factors that enhance special educators' intent to stay. *Exceptional Children*, 67(4), 549-567.
- Glazerman, S., Mayer, D., & Decker, P. (2006). Alternative routes to teaching: The impacts of Teach for America on student achievement and other outcomes. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 25(1), 75-96.
- Goetzinger, E. K. (2006). *Burnout among special educators: Do experience, certification, caseload, and school size make a difference?* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Griffiths, V. (2011). Career changers and fast-track induction: Teacher perspectives on their early professional development. *Teacher Development*, 15(1), 19-35.
- Guarino, C. M., Santibanez, L., & Daley, G. A. (2006). Teacher recruitment and retention: A review of the recent empirical literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 76(2), 173-208.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1982). Epistemological and methodological bases of naturalistic inquiry. *Educational Communication and Technology Journal*, 30(4), 233-252.
- Hattie, J., & Yates, G. (2014). *Visible learning and the science of how we learn*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hess, F. M. (2002). *Tear down this wall: The case for a radical overhaul of teacher certification*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/tchrqual/learn/preparingteachersconference/hess.html>
- Hong, J. Y. (2010). Pre-service and beginning teachers' professional identity and its relation to dropping out of the profession. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26, 1530-1543.
- Humphrey, D. C., Wechsler, M. E., & Hough, H. J. (2008). Characteristics of effective alternative teacher certification programs. *Teacher College Record*, 110(1), 1-63.
- Information packet for the Oklahoma alternative placement program. (2014). Retrieved from http://sde.ok.gov/sde/sites/ok.gov.sde/files/OSDE_Alt%20Placement%20TOTAL%20%20packet.pdf

- Ingersoll, R. M. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(3), 499-534.
- Ingersoll, R. M. (2007). *Misdiagnosing the teacher quality problem*. (CPRE Policy Briefs No. RB-49), Consortium for policy research in education. University of Pennsylvania.
- Ingersoll, R. M., & Strong, M. (2011). The impact of induction and mentoring programs for beginning teachers: A critical review of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(2), 201-233.
- Jorissen, K. T. (2003). Successful career transitions: Lessons from urban alternate route teachers who stayed. *The High School Journal*, 86(3), 41-51.
- Kagler, F. T. (2011). *Factors influencing the recruitment and retention of special education teachers: An evaluation of teacher retention in a southeastern metropolitan school district* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Kane, T. J., Rockoff, J. E., & Staiger, D. O. (2008). What does certification tell us about teacher effectiveness? Evidence from New York City. *Economics of Education Review*, 27(6), 615-631.
- Karge, B. D., & McCabe, M. (2014). Quality alternative certification programs in special education ensure high retention. *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification*, 9(2), 24-43.
- Kee, A. N. (2012). Feelings of preparedness among alternatively certified teachers: What is the role of program features? *Journal of Teacher Education*, 63(1), 23-38.
- Kleiner, M. M. (2000). Occupational licensing. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 14(4), 189-202.
- Kleiner, M. M., & Kreueger, A. B. (2010). The prevalence and effects of occupational licensing. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 48(4), 676-687.
- Kozleski, E., Mainzer, R. W., Deshler, D., Coleman, M. R., & Rodriguez-Walling, M. (2000). *Bright futures for exceptional learners: An agenda to achieve quality conditions for teaching and learning*. Arlington, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.
- Labue, A. C. (1960). Teacher certification in the United States: A brief history. *The Journal of Teacher Education*, 11(2), 147-172.
- Lavian, R. H. (2015). Masters of weaving: The complex role of special education teachers. *Teachers and Teaching*, 21(1), 103-126.

- Leko, M. M., & Smith, S. W. (2010). Retaining beginning special educators: What should administrators know and do? *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 45(5), 321-325.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1986). But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. *New Directions for Program Evaluation*, 1986(30), 73-84.
- Malinen, O. P., & Savolainen, H. (2016). The effect of perceived school climate and efficacy in behavioral management on job satisfaction and burnout: A longitudinal study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 60(9), 144-152.
- Maslach, C. (1982). *Burnout: The cost of caring*. New York, NY: Prentice Hall.
- McCusker, M. L. (2009). *Supporting resilient teachers: Resiliency and dynamic leadership in special education teacher retention* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- McCluskey, N. (2009). *How high is teacher pay in Oklahoma?* Retrieved from <https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/articles/mccluskey-high-teacher-pay-oklahoma-june-2009.pdf>
- McLeskey, J., Tyler, N. C., & Flippin, S. S. (2004). The supply and demand for special education teachers: A review of research regarding the chronic shortage of special education teachers. *The Journal of Special Education*, 38(1), 5-21.
- Miller, M. D., Brownell, M., & Smith, S. W. (1999). Factors that predict teachers staying in, leaving, or transferring from the special education classroom. *Exceptional Children*, 65(2), 201-218.
- Morrison, N. J. (2010). *The effects of induction, mentoring and local school culture on retention of beginning special education teachers* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- National Center for Educational Statistics. (2014). *School and Staffing Survey*. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass1112_2014_01_t1n.asp
- National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education in Education Research (2015). *Missing elements in the discussion of teacher shortages*. Retrieved from <http://www.caldercenter.org/sites/default/files/Missing%20Elements%20in%20the%20Discussion%20of%20Teacher%20Shortages%20PDF.pdf>
- Newberry, M. (2014). Teacher educator identity development of the nontraditional teacher educator. *Studying Teacher Education*, 10(2), 163-178.

- Non-traditional route to special education teacher certification. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://sde.ok.gov/sde/sites/ok.gov.sde/files/Non-Traditional%20Route%20chart_0.pdf
- O'Connor, E. A., Malow, M. S., & Bisland, B. M. (2011). Mentorship and instruction received during draining: Views of alternatively certified teachers. *Educational Review*, 63(2), 219-232.
- Oklahoma leads nation in cuts to per pupil spending, new report finds. (2016, October 21). Retrieved from <http://www.ecapitol.net/>
- Oklahoma State Department of Education (2014). *Oklahoma educator workforce shortage taskforce: Initial report*. Retrieved from http://sde.ok.gov/sde/sites/ok.gov.sde/files/documents/files/OK_Educator_Workforce_Shortage_Task_Force_Initial_Report.pdf
- Oklahoma State Department of Education (2015). *Teacher shortage taskforce: Preliminary report*. Retrieved from <http://okpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/Prelim.-report-Dec.-11-2015.pdf>
- Palmer, J. (2017, September 9). Within teacher shortage: The pool of special education teachers dwindles. *Oklahoma Watch*. Retrieved from <http://oklahomawatch.org>.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Poindexter, C. (2002). Meaning from methods: Re-presenting narratives of an HIV-affected caregiver. *Qualitative Social Work*, 1(1), 59-78.
- Postlethwaite, L. M. (2006). *Availability and utilization of supportive induction and mentoring services for special education teachers in South Carolina* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Price, D., & McCallum, F. (2015). Ecological influences on teachers' well-being and "fitness". *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(3), 195-209.
- Quigney, T. A. (2010). Alternative teaching certification in special education: Rationale, concerns, and recommendations. *Issues in Teacher Education*, 19(1), 41-58.
- Rauschenfels, D. J. (2000). *Retention of special education teachers: A look at successful special education teachers to determine why they remain in the field* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Ravitch, D. (2002). *A brief history of teacher professionalism*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/tchrqual/learn/preparingteachersconference/ravitch.html>

- Redding, C., & Smith, T. M. (2016). Easy in, easy out: Are alternatively certified teachers turning over at increased rates? *American Educational Research Journal*, 53(4), 1086-1125.
- Reis, H. T., Sheldon, K. M., Gable, R., Roscoe, J., Ryan, R. M. (2000). Daily well-being: The role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. *The Society for Personality and Social Psychology*, 26(4), 419-435.
- Robertson, J. S., & Singleton, J. D. (2010). Comparison of traditional versus alternative preparation of special education teachers. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 33(3), 213-224.
- Rosenberg, M. S. Boyer, K. L., Sindelar, P. T., & Misra, S. K. (2007). Alternative route programs for certification in special education: Program infrastructure, instructional delivery, and participant characteristics. *Exceptional Children*, 73(2), 224-241.
- Rosenberg, M. S., & Sindelar, P. T. (2001). *The proliferation of alternative routes to certification in special education: A critical review of the literature*. Arlington, VA: The National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education, The Council for Exceptional Children.
- Rosenberg, M. S., & Sindelar, P. T. (2005). The proliferation of alternative routes to certification in special education: A critical review of the literature. *The Journal of Special Education*, 39(2), 117-127.
- Rots, I., Aelterman, A., & Devos, G. (2014). Teacher education graduates' choice (not) to enter the teaching profession: Does teacher education matter? *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(3), 279-294.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2002). Overview of self-determination theory: An organismic dialectical perspective. In E. L. Deci & R. M. Ryan (Eds.), *Handbook of Self-Determination Research* (pp. 3-33). Rochester, NY: The University of Rochester Press.
- Saldana, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Sanders, J. (2015). *A grounded theory study of navigating the cycle of decline in public school teaching*. Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Sass, T. R. (2011). *Certification requirements and teacher quality*. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED529179.pdf>
- Sass, T. R. (2015). Licensure and worker quality: A comparison of alternative routes to teaching. *The Journal of Law & Economics*, 58(1), 1-35.

- Schonfeld, I. S., & Feinman, S. J. (2012). Difficulties of alternatively certified teachers. *Education and Urban Society*, 44(3), 215-246.
- Shinn, S. (2015). *Early-career special education teachers: Factors that promote retention in the field* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Shulman, L. S. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57(1), 1-22.
- Shuls, J. V., & Trivitt, J. R. (2015). Teacher effectiveness: An analysis of licensure screens. *Educational Policy*, 29(4), 645-675.
- Simmons, S. A. (2004). *Alternatively certified teachers: A qualitative inquiry into their motivations, approaches to learning, and commitment to teaching* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Simmons, S. A. (2005). Shortcuts to a meaningful career. *Action in Teacher Education*, 27(1), 36-44.
- Sindelar, P. T., Brownell, M. T., & Billingsley, B. (2010). Special education teacher education research: Current status and future directions. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 33(1), 8-24.
- Singer, J. D. (1992). Are special educators' career paths special? Results from a 13-year longitudinal study. *Exceptional Children*, 59(3), 262-279.
- Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2014). Teacher self-efficacy and perceived autonomy: Relations with teacher engagement, job satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion. *Psychological Reports: Employment Psychology and Marketing*, 114(1), 68-77.
- Stake, R. E. (1998). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (pp. 86-109). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Stake, R. E. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis*. New York City, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Stempien, L. R., & Loeb, R. C. (2002). Differences in job satisfaction between general education and special education teachers: Implications for retention. *Remedial and Special Education*, 23(5), 258-267.
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837-851.
- US Census Bureau (2010). *US Census Bureau Designated Urban Areas in Oklahoma 2014*. Retrieved from <http://www.healthsciences.okstate.edu/ruralhealth/documents/okuscbruralareas2014.pdf>

- USDE, Civil Rights Data Collection (2016). School climate and discipline: Know the data. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/data.html>
- USDE, IDEA (2016). *38th annual report to congress on the implementation of the individuals with disabilities education act*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/osep/2016/parts-b-c/index.html#download>
- USDE. IES, National Center for Education Statistics (2013-14). Common core of data [data file]. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/ACGR_RE_and_characteristics_2013-14.asp
- USDE, Title II (2015). *News you can use*. Retrieved from https://title2.ed.gov/public/44077_Title_II_Issue_Brief_Enrollment_V4a.pdf
- Unruh, L., & Holt, J. (2010). First-year teaching experiences: Are they different for traditionally versus alternatively certified teachers? *Action in Teacher Education*, 32(3), 3-14.
- Vaughan, A. L. (2005). *An interaction of teacher and school variables: Assessing influences on secondary teacher motivation, retention, school participation, and professional development* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Wasburn-Moses, L., & Rosenberg, M. S. (2008). Alternative route special education teacher preparation programs guidelines. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 31(4), 257-267.
- Watson, C. (2015). Survey shows growing impact of teacher shortage. Retrieved from <http://www.ossba.org/survey-shows-growing-impact-of-teacher-shortage>
- Woods, J. R. (2016). *Mitigating teacher shortages: Alternative teacher certification*. Retrieved from <http://www.ecs.org/ec-content/uploads/Mitigating-Teacher-Shortages-Alternative-Certification.pdf>
- Zane, R. L. (2012). *The impact of high stakes accountability systems and the new performance demands on special education teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and practice* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from UC Berkeley Theses and Dissertations.

APPENDIX A

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Wednesday, April 05, 2017
IRB Application No ED1736
Proposal Title: Novice, Alternatively Certified Special Education Teachers' Development

Reviewed and
Processed as: Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 4/4/2020

Principal
Investigator(s):

Joshua Hawkins	Jane S. Vogler
	424 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078	Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

☒ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

- 1Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms
- 2Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
- 3Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the research; and
- 4Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnett Watkins 219 Scott Hall (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Hugh Crethar, Chair
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Semi-Structured

1. What has been your journey to teaching?
2. Were there significant experiences/events that drew you into the classroom?
3. What was your experience like when you first began teaching?
4. Do you feel like you were prepared to teach then?
5. Do you feel prepared to teach now?
6. What training did you receive prior to entering the classroom that you have found helpful?
7. What training have you received since you entered the classroom that you have found helpful?
8. What difficulties have you encountered in your work and how have you overcome them?
9. Do you feel supported in your work?
10. What supports do you access or are available to you? How have they impacted you?
11. How do you regard yourself as a learner?
12. What has been the most important learning experience for you as a teacher?
13. How do you feel about your progress in the field?
14. What event or experience have you had in your time as a teacher that has most affected you?
15. Do you intend to continue teaching? What might impact that decision?

Please help me identify artifacts that might give me better insight into what your experience as a new teacher has been like (e.g. preparation materials, reflections, journals, memos, pictures, etc.).

APPENDIX C

Background Information

Note: All personal information will be kept confidential.

What is your gender? _____

Which of the following best describes your race?

____ African American

____ Asian American

____ American Indian

____ Hispanic/Latino(a)

____ White

____ Other: please specify: _____

What is your age? _____

Identify your district: ____ Rural ____ Urban Cluster ____ Urban

How many years/months of teaching experience do you have? _____

How many students are on your caseload? _____

What degree(s) do you hold? _____

What is your current certification status? ____ Provisional ____ Standard

Which alternative route are you following? ____ *Para to Teacher* ____ *Non-Traditional SPED*

Identify the requirements you have completed to date:

____ OGET ____ OSAT:M/M ____ OSAT: S/P ____ OPTE ____ 12-18 Grad Hrs

Briefly describe your current and any previous teaching assignments.

Describe any prior work experience that has helped you in your current position.

List all memorable professional development activities in which you have participated.

What questions would you ask yourself about your development or experience as a teacher?

VITA

Joshua Lowell Hawkins

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: "FIGURING IT OUT": A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY EXPLORING THE DEVELOPMENT OF NOVICE, ALTERNATIVELY CERTIFIED SECIAL EDUCATORS IN OKLAHOMA

Major Field: Educational Psychology

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Psychology at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December, 2017.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Educational Leadership at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, Weatherford, Oklahoma in 2012.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Special Education at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, Weatherford, Oklahoma in 2001.

Experience:

Instructor of Education and Special Education Program Coordinator at Northwestern Oklahoma State University from August 2015 to present.

Administrator and Special Education Director (K-12) from August 2012 to May 2015.

Special Education Teacher (K-12) from January 2002 to May 2015.